

All Saints Sunday
November 1, 2015
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, IA
Rev. Amy Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

There's a lot of eating and swallowing going on in our first lesson today.

Isaiah tells us "The Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food and well-aged wines... and the Lord will swallow up death forever."

Eating is important when it comes to facing death.

- We share in food together at funerals.
- We remind people to eat when they're caregiving or grieving.
- After a death, we bring food or reach out and ask if we can have lunch.

When we feel like we've been swallowed up by illness and death it's important to keep eating, to keep taking into our bodies that which will give us energy and life.

I'll never forget the students who brought me food after my mother's death ten years ago this month.

- My mom had been very ill in the spring but doctors believed she was recovering. She came to visit me in Decorah, had a massive relapse and died suddenly in my apartment.
- I'd just moved to town; I'd been campus pastor at Luther for just four months. My husband Matt was away as a chaplain in the national guard and Nathan was just 18 months old. It was a really difficult time.

Colleagues and friends in Decorah were a wonderful help and provided so much support and food, but many students were understandably uncomfortable with the grief of their new pastor. Yet two students - Nicki Mosier and Elizabeth Zant - showed up at my apartment in the Luther farmhouse near Baker Village.

They said, "We're so sorry. We wanted to bring you food but this is all we had in our dorm room." and handed me a bag of potato chips and a 12-pack of Coke.

Looking back, that gift feels as powerful as a feast of rich food and well-aged wines.

There is something so healing about food in the face of death.

Good Shepherd, you have firsthand experience of this from the past year:

You shared meals after Pr. Hasvold and Pr. Mau's funerals;

You brought bars to the funeral home for the family of James Bakke;

You've fed each other at potlucks, cookouts, fellowship times and suppers after Wednesday worship;

You've gathered again and again for the feast of Holy Communion. In the face of death and grief, you have been nourished and have fed each other. As you've eaten, you have experienced new life.

There is something so healing about food in the face of death.

This was especially true for the people that the prophet Isaiah addresses in our first lesson today.

- They lived amidst a near constant state of war as neighboring superpowers vied for control of the region.
- The wars led to chaos, food shortages and famines.

In the midst of this scarcity, the rulers of these superpowers would host feasts of rich food and well-aged wines to show dominance over their enemies. Kings would throw lavish feasts to demonstrate their wealth and power, secure loyalty and communicate their protection.

Isaiah uses the imagery of the feasts of empires to tell the people that God will provide for them and that God is more powerful than all their enemies. Isaiah uses this imagery but adds a surprising, more radical image.

At the feast where God is the host, the host doesn't eat the rich food and well-aged wines prepared for the guests of this banquet. Instead this host, God, swallows death. God consumes death.

In this twist on the banquet imagery we see that God has power over even death itself as God swallows up death forever. The imagery of God swallowing death was especially powerful in Isaiah's day because people often associated death with being swallowed.

Many Old Testament scriptures describe death as the earth opening and swallowing people up.

The Hebrew word for death (mwt - "moat") is related to the name of the Canaanite god of death, Môt "moat". Môt was pictured as an enormous mouth in the earth that would open up wide like the jaws of a whale and swallow up everything, taking people down into the earth, to the underworld, where they were separated from God.

The prophet Isaiah challenges this understanding of the power of death, and reimagines the relationship between God and death.

- There will come a time, he says, when God will swallow up death and then death will no longer exist outside of God.

- God will take death into God's own being so that not even death can separate us from God and from life.
- Nothing, not even death, will be outside the realm of God.
- When we enter into death, even then we will be held in God.

Isaiah offered this vision of the future and it came to be in Jesus.

- In Jesus, God came and took death into God's own being.
- For three days it looked as if death had swallowed up Jesus, as if he would stay entombed in the earth.
- But death could not keep Jesus down; death cannot stop the all-consuming, all-powerful love of God.
- And now, as the apostle Paul says, nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God.
- Now death is completely within the realm of God and God brings ultimate healing and resurrection - life out of death.
- Even in death, we belong to God.

For now, death still has some power. We still suffer, die and grieve. Some deaths are peaceful and healing. Yet too many people still die too young or in painful, tragic ways. We are left with the kinds of questions and grief we see expressed in the Gospel reading today.

The scripture from Revelation today promises that, one day, death will be no more. One day, God will bring a new heaven and a new earth where death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

But for now, we can trust that even in death we are held in God. And for now, we get to feast with God as Isaiah promised.

We may not have rich food or particularly well-aged wines; but more importantly, we get to feast on Jesus' very presence with us here. In this feast, we take both the death and the life of Jesus into our very bodies. We take in all that we need to face life and death with hope and confidence.

And like those feasters that Isaiah imagined, we also have the presence of God who wipes away the tears from all faces. Someday, there won't be any more tears; God will wipe away our tears once and for all. But for now, our God wipes away our tears again and again.

As God feeds and comforts us we are strengthened to be who we are - God's saints for the sake of the world.

This All Saint's Day reminds us that we all are saints. In Christ we all have been claimed for God's work of feeding, healing and transforming the world.

- Because God comforts us, we can go out to wipe away tears and work for the end of all tears.
- Because God nourishes us, we can go out and feed one another and the world God loves.
 - Sometimes we will feed people after a death;
 - other times it will be at the food pantry or the coffee shop;
 - sometimes we'll even feed others with coke and potato chips;
 - in all of this we are doing the work of God's saints;
 - in all of our living and dying, we belong to God.

Thanks be to God.