

Sermon 5

Topic: Too Much A One Thing Good Fi Nothing, Part 2

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 23:20-21, 25:16

I recently visited the Chimwewe congregation of the United Church of Zambia in the Chimwewe region of the city of Kitwe, Zambia. It is a robust Christian congregation with a 65-year-old pastor. After the first of its three regular Sunday morning services, I was invited by the pastor along with a visiting colleague academic to the vestry for tea and for a conversation.

The Pastor already knew that I was diabetic and struck up a conversation with me in which he shared his own story of diabetes. I told him that I was insulin dependent. I told him that I had found throughout the years that the secret to maintaining control of my diabetes was to administer the insulin once daily and to carefully manage my diet of five small meals three hours apart each day. I have had good control, I told him, over the last several years. He was keenly interested in the idea of five small meals instead of three meals per day. I emphasized to him the idea of eating small portions. I told him that however hungry one is, if one consumes a small nutritious meal, one will feel as full 10 minutes after eating, just as if one had consumed a large meal. I have come to my lifestyle approach from the advice of nutritionists and because of its impact on my sugar and blood pressure controls, though I admitted to him that I am not doing as well with my hypertension as I am with my diabetes.

This advice about eating small portions has been part of the record of scripture in the book of Proverbs from long ago. In fact, Proverbs gives the advice in two ways; one negative and the other positive. In Chapter 23, 18-21 the Proverbs warns against both gluttony and drunkenness. And in chapter 25 it simply advises,

*If you find honey, eat just enough—
too much of it, and you will vomit.*

Put simply, according to the scriptures overeating is not good, it causes the food to lose its quality and its positive effect. Modern medicine has taught us that eating small portions is the best way to get the best from foods and to ensure our health.

Let us drill down further on this matter of the dangers of overeating: we are aware of two opposite but unhelpful treatment of foods. There is on one hand, the under nourishment, malnutrition and hunger that are pernicious realities, concerning which everything should be done to counter and to curb. Often there is a problem of distribution, access and costs where food supply is concerned. There are significant numbers of the world population living on less than US\$2.00 per day and this has led to hunger and malnutrition. In response, there is a need for activism to promote food security policies and better and fairer terms of trade to ensure the world's surplus also benefits the marginalized, vulnerable and poor of the world. These include uprooted and displaced peoples affected by war and strife and famine and drought.

In contrast to under-nourishment, malnutrition and hunger, there is the reality of obesity and of overfeeding. Obesity is often thought about as the problem of the rich, but it has often been found to be a problem among the urban poor. It is the result of the consumption of concentrated fats and salts and of fried foods and concentrated sugars. Sugary drinks and snacks with uncooked salts contribute just as much to obesity. Here our attention is directed to the ill health, the chronic non-communicable diseases that are exacerbated by the portions that we consume. Often there are things in the meals themselves that are gluttony-inducing and we need to ensure that we remain in control of ourselves where our consumption habits and the portions we consume are concerned. Here are some reasons to manage our portions and remain in control of ourselves.

First for own sakes, **let us debunk the myth that big is best.** A big plate of food in front of you is neither proof of your prosperity nor that those who put it in front of you, love you very much. Demanding smaller portions is a good start. It will both make sure that what you have in your pantry lasts longer and that you are around to enjoy it.

Secondly, there is a limit to the quantity of food consumed at one sitting that the body can process efficiently. The proverbs speak about vomiting or about losing your wits about you with drunkenness, it implies that after a certain amount is consumed, the very food and drink begin to have a counter-productive impact on your body. But a more important rule by which to manage yourself is a value that restrains you by saying even good things can become bad if they are overdone. And as we say in Jamaica “too much of one thing good for nothing.”

A meal is a social activity, at its best having; a meal is also a space to share with and think about your loved ones. Gluttony and overfeeding defeat the purpose of a meal by unmindfully being pre-occupied with only yourself and your desires, to the neglect of all else, including your own health.

Lastly, loss of control which results in gluttony and drunkenness is a demonstration of deteriorating self-management as well as a sign of the diminishment of one’s sense of self. Drunkenness and gluttony are both signs of a cry for help. Very often people over-eat when things are not right and not going right in their lives, they are often signs of depression or of not coping properly with the ebb and flow of one’s life. It is important that even with the foods that you love, that you assert control by saying, “no!” by saying “stop!” by saying “enough!” This is to put yourself in charge of yourself. And you know what? According to the proverbs it is good for us and if I may add, I would also say it is wise to be, and remain in control.

This is why food is best enjoyed in small portions. Your body will do its best to process small portions; it will nourish you and not harm you. And very importantly, if you consume less, you are leaving some to share with others, to ensure that your gluttony does not exacerbate other people’s hunger and it will leave you space to be more mindful and sensitive to others. Manage your portions, it can save your life.