

Title: Leaving a Lasting Taste  
Date: 11/5/2023 (All Saints, Year A)  
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)  
Readings: [Revelation 7:9-17](#); [Psalm 34:1-10, 22](#); [1 John 3:1-3](#); [Matthew 5:1-12](#)  
Video Link: <https://youtu.be/gSikD6wwKWY?t=1317>

Taste and see that God is good;  
happy are they who trust in the most high (Ps 34:8, The Saint Helena Salter)  
Amen.

It sounds so simple.

“Taste and see that God is good.”

These words just roll right off the tongue. Say them with me.

“Taste and see that God is good.”

“Taste and see that God is good.”

“Taste and see that God is good.”

I've heard them. I've sung them. I've prayed them. AND I've never really stopped to think about them. They're so straightforward there's not much to analyze.

“God is good.” Check

“See that God is good.” Check

“Taste and...” Hold on a moment.

I know what it means to see that God is good. But...how do we taste God?

My first thought goes to communion wafers. But that's probably not fair to God. If we used what Jesus used, we'd get a taste of real bread. Perhaps even a loaf of bread sweetened by local honey from Kat & Don and baked with flour from Barton Springs Mill. As it states on their website, they have stone ground flour from heritage whole grains. Now *that* sounds tasty.

Perhaps we're not meant to take this literally. Who in the world would read passages from the Bible literally when a good chunk of it is meant to be read as a metaphor or analogy, or to function as liturgy or myth? Well, actually...

Our first reading today is from the Book of Revelation. And in spite of all I've learned, when I hear “Revelation” my mind STILL jumps to the imagery of the Rapture, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the Left Behind series. These interpretations of Scripture have such a strong hold on human imagination that some people believe this is the way events will actually unfold in reality. And a subset of those people believe in this so strongly they engage in violence and warfare in the hope that this future will arrive sooner rather than later.

If we're going the literal route, I'd much rather we collectively envision "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." Imagine if we all worked toward a day when the great multitude living on this earth, starting in Austin and Kyle and Buda, will "hunger no more and thirst no more." Given the high temperatures this past summer, let us consider how to live so that "the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat."

I pray that we can tell this story and live it out in such a way that when people hear about the Book of Revelation in the future, they will picture the lamb that will shepherd us and guide us to the springs of life. Instead of inflicting violence and warfare, I hope they will follow in the footsteps of the God who wipes away every tear from our eyes.

So, maybe a literal interpretation is a good place to start.

Now, back to the question I started with. "How do we taste God?"

We can taste God's creations. Stone fruits from trees, berries from bushes. Climbing vegetables from vines, and root vegetables from beneath the ground. And for those of us who are not vegetarian or vegan, y'all can taste God's creatures as well. As I've learned from my time in Texas, it's not barbeque unless it's smoked meat.

I will admit that I often multitask when I eat. I eat **and** I talk or read or watch something. But when I'm focused on eating, I can **taste** the goodness of God. I feel gratitude for the sunlight and water and all the people whose labor went into putting that meal in front of me, all the hands that planted and harvested and transported and prepared it. It's a blessing that neither drought nor flood nor war nor any natural or manmade disasters kept any of these ingredients from reaching my table.

Psalms 34 begins with "I will bless God at all times, and praise shall ever be in my mouth."

Perhaps to taste God is to praise God. Perhaps to taste God is to proclaim the greatness of God, and then notice the taste those words leave in our mouth.

When we witness to others the ways in which God has acted in our lives, we share our stories. Sometimes our prayers have been answered, and sometimes they haven't, or at least not in the way we asked for or hoped for.

When we share those experiences of God, does it leave a sour taste in our mouth? Is there a hint or more than a hit of bitterness? Would listeners describe our tone as salty or do we sound grounded? Grounded being my best analogy for umami, which is a savory, earthy taste. Or would they call our story "sweet"?

In his commentary on today's Psalm, Dr. Pablo Jiménez explains that taste is actually a recurrent theme in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> "The Hebrew Bible uses honey as a metaphor for Torah. God's word is sweet as honey for the righteous, who can grasp divine wisdom. Like food, the divine word sustains the believer."

He goes on to give several examples.

In the book of Ezekiel, there is this exchange between the prophet and God. “Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey” (Ez 3:3).

The word of God doesn’t just leave a sweet taste; it fills our stomach. This is not telling us to rip pages out of the Bible and physically eat them; this **is** telling us that we can take these words into our bodies in such a way that they will nourish and sustain us.

One of my favorite collects to pray begins in this way, “Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them...”

We don’t digest the Scriptures as an intellectual exercise. We don’t digest them so that they’ll live on in our minds. We digest them so they will live on in our bodies. We digest them so that we will be children of God not only in name but in thought, word, and deed.

Dr. Jimenez also gives an example from the book of Revelation. “So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, ‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.’ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter” (Rev 10:9-10).

This sounds more true to life. Just because the words are sweet, that doesn’t mean that they aren’t challenging. Just because the words go down easy, that doesn’t mean that we don’t get knots in our stomach when we try to apply them when talking about race, or guns, or Gaze and Israel or family members we strongly disagree with.

Look at the gospel according to Matthew. Jesus reminds us that just because life is bitter right now, this doesn’t mean that it can’t be, or won’t be, sweet in the future.

Just because we are poor in spirit, that doesn’t mean the kingdom of heaven won’t be ours. We keep praying for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and living as if it is already, and one day, it will be here. First in glimpses, then in longer and longer moments.

Just because we are mourning, that doesn’t mean we won’t ever find comfort. In the show WandaVision, when Wanda described grief as this wave that washes over her and knocks her down each time she tries to stand up, Vision asks her, “What is grief, if not love persevering?”<sup>2</sup> Grief can point us to the enduring presence of love.

Just because we are merciful, that doesn’t mean we are foolish and people will walk all over us. Sometimes, turning the other cheek will cause confusion to the person inflicting the hurt. Sometimes, loving our enemy as ourselves, acknowledging that they too are

hurting and grieving, that they too want the best kind of future for their children, can break cycles of war and revenge, cycles that continue to inflict violence and create new enemies.

Now, there are people who cry persecution and want to be martyrs that are trying to build up their own power and authority instead of the kingdom of heaven.

There are people who consider themselves pure in heart and who want other people to conform to their notions and standards of purity. They will indeed see God, and I hope that they will see that God is less than pleased with their efforts. There are people who want to make peace, but only on their terms and without respecting the dignity of every human being.

It is not enough to see or hear the words of God, we have to taste them for ourselves, and we need to pay attention to the taste they leave in other people's mouths when they hear those words from us and when they see those words through us.

As poet Padraig O'Tuama describes the exorcisms and reparative therapy he was forced to undergo by the Christian mission he joined, words can plant bombs in people's heads, especially words that imply that there is something fundamentally wrong with a person, as if that person is a distorted image of God, a lesser child of God.

Here, we turn to the example of the saints. The earliest saints were martyrs, Christians who died for their faith, those who would rather die than renounce or denounce (give up or condemn) their faith. When it comes to more recent saints, there is more focus and more information on how they **lived** in the face of the challenges of their times. They witnessed to the presence of God when it feels like God is silent or absent or negligent.

In the 2022 edition of Lesser Feasts and Fasts, which used to be called Holy Men, Holy Women, the preface takes care to point out that "Many a holy life, when carefully examined, will reveal flaws or the bias of a particular moment in history or ecclesial perspective."<sup>3</sup>

Saints, they're just like us.

Saints, we're just like them.

We too can be a living expression of the presence of Christ. Even when that expression feels small or unremarkable to us, it may feel big to the person who receives it and the person who observes it. Even when we feel weak or inadequate, that gives us a chance to demonstrate the power of God who blesses us and works through us.

And now let us join the communion of saints by reaffirming our baptismal covenant, found on page 304. This reminds us that what we believe goes hand in hand with how we will live.

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<sup>1</sup> Pablo A. Jiménez, [“Exegetical Perspective on Psalm 34:1–10, 22,”](#) in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 229.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a35713623/wandavision-episode-8-grief-quote-explained/>

<sup>3</sup> [Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2022](#) p vii