

**“Jesus, Food and Us...”**

**16/9/18**

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

What does it really mean for us to live our lives as Christians in the real world?

Yes, we go to church.

Yes, we recite the creed as faithful Anglicans should.

Yes, we participate in the Eucharist.

Yes, we share in corporate worship.

Yes, we love our neighbour, or at least try too!

But is there more to living as a Christian in the real world than this?

Reflect for a moment on the following questions...

Do we have an ethical responsibility to consider how our food gets to us; where and how it was produced; how it was processed, packaged and transported?

Were all the workers treated fairly and animals treated humanely?

Do we know the origin and consequences of cheap food?

Is it possible to eat ethically?

What about wastage of both food and packaging?

Can we really make a difference?

I recently had the opportunity to listen to Dr Peter Johnston (UCT) who is an expert on human adaptation to climate change. Peter addressed the issue of the link between food production and human care for the Earth.

Firstly, it may be interesting for us to ask if there is a history, if any at all, of food ethics...

The answer would be a resounding, “Yes!” From the early Greeks through to the early Jewish communities much emphasis was placed on what type of food was to be eaten, where and when, as well as how it was to be prepared.

In Ancient Greece, food ethics was no less prominent than, and existed side by side with, sexual ethics and medical ethics. Roman and early Christian writers devoted serious attention to the moral aspects of food intake. In the sphere of food consumption, a rational and moral life was a temperate one, living in accordance with nature.

The Hebrew scriptures introduce a new and highly significant principle into the history of food ethics, namely the idea that certain food products are to be regarded as *contaminated* in view of their origin – not because they are unhealthy, tasteless, difficult to digest, or something like that, but because they are unlawful *in themselves*.

Interestingly, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, food ethics was transformed in terms of increasing scientific interest in food intake. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> C that the social dimension of food ethics was discovered. Now the focus shifted to the production and distribution of food products.

The nineteenth century constitutes an important chapter in the history of food ethics, predominantly because the importance of the social dimension of food production and consumption emerged. Food intake and lack of self-restraint become problematic because of their social, rather than their individual impact – the relationship between population increase and agriculture (available food).

During the twentieth century, the impact of diet and health became apparent, food pyramids and nutritional guidelines were developed.

What does the Bible have to say on the matter?

Some mixed messages if taken out of context, like:

### Acts 15:20, Eat Anything?

- <sup>NIV</sup> Acts 15:20 ...to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood
- <sup>NAU</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:27 If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake.
- 1 Cor 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.
- 1 Cor 10:25-26 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

But what is the overall message Jesus left us all with?

*Love the Lord your God*



*Love your neighbor as yourself*

Today, we sit with many factors when it comes to understanding the production and distribution of food:

We now have at our disposal the science of diet and nutrition. We are now able to access knowledge about food like never before. Yet, how many of us do that?

We also sit with the issues of contamination of the food system through the introduction of pesticides, artificial fertilisers, preservatives and genetic modification.

We have also become used to highly processed foods where society seems to think that basic foods are primitive and foods containing a multitude of ingredients are preferential or even “better” for us.

What does this mean for us as Christians?

Well, let’s look at those questions again:

“Do we have an ethical responsibility to consider how our food gets to us?

Where and how was it produced?

How was it processed, packaged and transported?

Were all the workers treated fairly and animals treated humanely?

Do we know the origin and consequences of cheap food?

Lastly:

Is it necessary to eat ethically?

Is it possible to eat ethically?

So let’s imagine for a moment that we go down to the supermarket after church this morning to do some shopping...

Perhaps these are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves?

Where and how were these strawberries grown?

Did those practices use land and water efficiently and pesticides safely?

Who grew the coffee beans and how were the workers treated?

Were the chickens that laid these eggs kept humanely and what does humane chicken-rearing even look like?

How healthy is factory farmed meat?

There are seven principles that underpin ethical food choices:

1. **Transparency:** We need to know how our food is produced.
2. **Fairness:** Producing and trading food should not impose costs/burdens on others.
3. **Humanity:** Inflicting unnecessary suffering on animals is wrong.
4. **Social Responsibility:** Workers are entitled to decent wages and working conditions.
5. **Needs:** Preserving life and health justifies more than other desires.
6. **Morality:** “Rich Christians in an age of Hunger” - food safety and nutrition
7. **Waste:** Using more than we need and throwing food away

But, what difference can you and I make?

R – Read the labels!

A – Ask questions!

D – Do not waste!

A - Always

R – Re-cycle!

Jesus challenges us today in our Gospel reading to be mindful of gaining the world at the cost of our soul. Part of our responsibility and calling as Christians is to be mindful of how we live our lives... this includes how and what we eat. This is a challenge for many of us, as most of us, including myself, eat to merely satisfy our hunger and more often than not, do not consider the ethics of the food we partake in.

Jesus calls us to be holistic Christians, so that we can make a difference in the world. This includes every aspect of our lives, as well as the food we eat.

My challenge to you in the week ahead is to ask some of the questions that need asking when it comes to the food we buy to eat.

After all, healthier food means healthier bodies and holistic living that will be pleasing to our Lord.

May God bless you in the days ahead as you become more mindful of our responsibilities as Christians in all facets of our daily lives.

Amen.

(I acknowledge the work and material provided to me by Dr Peter Johnston)