

# “Food for the Spirit...,”

2 October 2005

(*communion*)

Bible passage: **John 4: 23a, 24** (*The Message*)

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God...God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship God must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

About five years ago now, our Marketing Team spent some time developing what I think is called a “tag line” to add to our name and logo. If you look at the front of your program, you’ll see what I mean. The words below the logo and name are “Food for the Spirit, Wisdom for the Soul.” As I recall, some of you suggested various lines that we might use, and the team selected the one they thought best represented what The Garden is all about.

When we chose that as our message title for today, I thought, “Oh, that should be easy enough to sort out.” Boy was I wrong! On its simplest level, I suppose it would appear obvious—we’re talking about that which nourishes our spirits. However, in delving deeper into it, I determined that there are many, many layers to that tag line—from the meaning of spirit, to who or what is spirit, to what nourishes the spirit, and to the question “can we even begin to name that which nourishes the spirit,” whatever it is?

Then I remembered something that Marcus Borg wrote in his book, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. In that book, he describes the historical Jesus as a “spirit person.” By that, he meant that Jesus was someone to whom the sacred (God) was an experienced reality. Then he tried to define what that actually meant. For instance, he said that a spirit person is one who may have a strong sense of another layer of reality. I like to think of that as seeing life or ourselves or another in a totally new way. It’s like having a new set of eyes with which to see deeper into life. Borg says, “**The world is perceived in such a way that previous perceptions seem nothing more than blindness.**”

The author also suggests that a spirit person sees the experience of that which is sacred sometimes in nature. It may be either in the vastness of nature, or in some specific object within nature that takes on a whole new meaning for us.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. Late in the summer, Mike and I went to visit Suzanne at their place in Michigan. She and I walked the beach on a couple of occasions, and Suzanne always had her camera with her. One evening, we were walking down to watch the sunset, and as we went along, the waves washed in a tiny little frog. Now you need to know that I’m probably the most un-observant person in the world, but because Suzanne was so into all that was natural there, the frog caught our attention.

She took a number of pictures, and when we got back to the house, she loaded them onto her computer, and then started zooming in on that little frog. As I watched the image become clearer and clearer, I was overwhelmed with the wonder of what I was seeing—the frog’s eyes, the strong

legs, the grains of sand around him, the water washing over him. (*frog pictures on screen*) It was remarkable, and I felt a sense of something far greater than I coming very near and coming very alive. I don't have those kinds of experiences very often, but it was powerful, and I began to have a better understanding of what Borg was trying to say, and what so many people discover in nature.

Our Bible passage for today talks about spirit, really in a couple of ways. Let's look and listen: **"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God...God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship God must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration."**

This is Jesus speaking, and this segment is found in the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well. To refresh our memories—Jesus stopped at a well in the middle of the day to get some water. However, this wasn't just any well...it was in the middle of the Samaritan community, basically amid a group that was considered undesirable by the rest of society at the time. Here, he engaged in a long conversation with a woman who appears to have a rather tainted past, and the passage we have comes toward the end of that story.

In the passage we have, Jesus uses the term "spirit" in two ways. One of those ways is meant to represent the presence, power and activity of God in the world. It is that Spirit of God that vitalizes us so that we know that we have that spirit within us. As I understand it, that is like having a piece of the one who gave birth to us as a part of our being in one way or another.

In other words, there's a piece of God in each of us. That's why the passage goes on to say that we relate to God out of our "very being," our "spirits," our "true selves." Scientists are discovering that our spirits being a part of God's spirit isn't just some hypothetical thing, but may be a very true reality.

Dean Hamer, a geneticist at the National Institutes of Health, has written that he and his colleagues have isolated a "God Gene." It has an official gene name and designation, but that's not important for us. What is important is that Hamer says that this gene establishes spirituality as an instinct **"folded deep in the intricate strands of our DNA."** Jacqueline Small may have said it best with these words: **"We are not human beings learning to be spiritual; we are spiritual beings learning to be human."**

*Video: Sedona scenes with quote re: "earth people on spiritual journey to the stars..."*

## Message part 2

The way I understand that for our purposes today is that within each of us is a part of the sacred that yearns to connect with the ultimate Sacred. In other words, deep within each of us is a yearning, albeit subtle, for that which connects with someone greater and deeper than ourselves. I believe that ties closely with a desire for meaning and purpose, for a more authentic way of living, for that which assures us that this life is not all for naught. In other words, we have a hunger deep within us that wants to be nourished and fed.

That's what the phrase "Food for the Spirit" addresses—that hunger that needs to be fed. But how? With what? We're so different; how can it be "one size fits all?"

This is where trusting God comes in, because I believe that God knows us better than we know ourselves; God loves us and wants us to find that which feeds our spirits and help us grow both in relationship with the ultimate Divine Spirit, with others, and with our own selves. Ours is our own path, our own journey. Sue Monk-Kidd, in her book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* writes about that very thing, and says, “You create a path of your own by looking within yourself and listening to your soul, cultivating your own ways of experiencing the sacred, and then practicing it. Practicing until you make it a song that sings you.”

It is our own path, and our path may be quite different from another person’s path. Each of us has to be open to that which does indeed nourish and nurture our souls into loving God and loving one another.

But, there is help. Deborah O’Connor Clow put it like this: “I think the Divine Source is deeply committed to the evolution of our spiritual hearts and offers us material tools with which to better understand the invisible world.” What might some of those tools be? What is the food we hunger for?

There are many who have ideas about that. For instance, Robert Fogel, Nobel-Prize winning economist and University of Chicago professor, says that there are fifteen spiritual resources that we need in order to be fed, in order to cope with the challenge of living our lives. These are the ones he names: a sense of purpose...a vision of opportunity...a sense of the mainstream of work and life...a strong family ethic...a sense of community...a capacity to engage with diverse groups...an ethic of benevolence...a work ethic...a sense of discipline...the capacity to focus and concentrate one’s efforts...a capacity to resist the lure of hedonism...a capacity for self-education...a thirst for knowledge...an appreciation for quality...self esteem. We may or may not agree with him, but that is quite a list of all the things that might feed our souls and help our spirits grow and evolve, unfold and flower.

I was interested in a recent *Newsweek* magazine article that reported on a survey among 1,004 Americans on the topic of their spirituality. One of the questions they asked was, “When do you feel the strongest connection to God?” In other words, what feeds your spirits? These were the top responses: 40% said when they were praying alone; 21% said when they were in nature; 21% reported it was when they were in worship. Prayer, nature, worship—time together with God with others that’s what 82% of the respondents answered.

How would we answer that same question? When do we experience the strongest connection with God? When we identify those moments or experiences, then we’re coming close to identifying that which feeds our spirits.

### **Video: What’s Cooking? (Feast with “amen.”)**

One way in which some experience food for the spirit is in the act of eating together, or as we call it in the church--sharing in communion together. As I’ve said many times before, I believe that we have communion here at The Garden every week, because we’re all gathered at the table, and we have food to eat and share with one another. We’re using fall foods this morning—pumpkin bread and apple cider, but it really doesn’t matter what the food is. It is really symbolic of taking into our bodies that which can nurture our spirits.

Everyone is invited to participate. It doesn’t matter where we’ve been or what we’ve done, how

good or how bad we think we are, everyone is welcome. Having said that, however, I know there are some here this morning, who for whatever reason, would prefer not to participate in the act of communion. If that's where you are, I invite you to share with us in the spirit of communion, breathing in that which can nurture us on our journey.

Let me explain how this will happen. In just a moment, I'll invite the servers to come forward, and they will bring the bread and juice to your table. When all the tables have been served, we will eat together at the same time.

The reason we take communion is that it commemorates the story we are told about the last supper that Jesus had with his friends. After the meal was finished, he took bread, which was part of every meal, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends, saying "Take, eat. And when you do, remember what we shared together."

Likewise, he took the cup, offered thanks to God, gave it to his disciples and said, "Every time you drink from the cup, remember the time we spent together, the life we shared. Remember me."

As the servers come around to your tables, I would invite us to think about what feeds our spirits, and to open our hands and hearts to receive that which God is offering us."

I'd like to invite the servers to come forward now.

**Communion:** As you eat this, remember it is food for the body and for the spirit. Take, eat... Amen.

Let us pray....

CLOSING:

James Beard has said, "**Food is our common ground, a universal experience.**" Food for the spirit is also common ground, and a universal experience for us all. This coming week, whenever we are eating or sharing food together, let's remember that's one of the ways that we might be feeding the spirit within us.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.