

THE JESUS DIET
Rally Day –September 13, 2015 –Galatians 2: 15-21
The Church of the Covenant

“The Jesus Diet” is not a sermon in anticipation of a soon-to-be-released book by the same title. It is an illustration aimed at trying to distinguish between the law and the Gospel, between trying to be good and having the good presence of Jesus alive within, between struggle and joy. If you listen carefully you just might find one of the most profound secrets to life. (Everyone is going to want to come to many of the adult ed offerings at the church this fall which unpack this spiritual distinction from the Bible). Last night we heard Dr. Andrew Purves of Pittsburgh Seminary exposit this text from Galatians in a far, far better way than I could ever do it. He with his Scottish accent is best at interpreting “The Book” as he would say.

Many years ago in another church there was a dear man who was overweight and he and I would joke around about being the two “Chubby Cheribs”. Humor sometimes masks the deep sadness and struggles that go along with being too heavy. And one day he came up to me and he was concerned and asked me to promise him that I would lose weight. And of course, I did. Within about six months I understood better why he had asked me to promise because he had a major stroke and among other things he lost his eyesight. I was visiting him in the hospital, this dear friend who was also a church member, and he reached up and touched my stomach, my overly large stomach, if I may say, and said: “Stu, you promised.” He was to pass away not long afterward and in pursuit of my promise to my friend indeed I endeavored to lose weight. Losing weight is easy, as I liked to say, I’ve done it hundreds of times. Its just that the next morning when I wake up the weight comes back. But this time I really worked at it. I religiously dieted and watched everything I ate. I exercised every day. I took a walk around the church cemetery –nothing is quite as motivational as walking among people who didn’t go on a diet. Indeed, I kept my promise to him and lost more than 50 pounds. But, of course, that was 30 years ago and just like sin, the pounds have seemingly made their way back and reinhabited, you know, my overly large boned frame. But the way I lost the weight was very legalistic –count calories, watch what I ate, never miss a walk, be disciplined, rigorous, unyielding and focused. I lost weight legalistically, by the book, by the law; not out of a sense of joy, but because I was driven to do so.

Flash forward now to this past March, some 30 years later. I have gained, over time, much more weight than I have ever weighed. And it is literally “weighing me down”. I have little energy, sleep apnea, stomach reflux, I am borderline diabetic, I can hardly walk up the steps at the church let alone the hill by my house. My blood pressure is too high, my cholesterol elevated, I feel lousy. My doctor keeps telling me I have to lose weight and of course I cannot. More and more I cannot sleep at night due to stomach discomfort. And I develop what I refer to as the “burping incident” and burp from 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon until 2:30 a.m. in the morning. My doctor is quite concerned and orders tests. The burping incident returns and he orders me to the Emergency Room. His concern, of course, is my heart. So he orders an exhaustive assortment of heart tests. I am supposed to be moderating the meeting of Washington Presbytery, my wonderful pastor, Craig Kephart is visiting me in the hospital, and the doctor there says I cannot go to the Presbytery Meeting but have to stay in the hospital. I say I’ll check out anyway; the ER doctor says it would be AMA, against medical advice, I look over to Craig for support, and he nods “NO” so I stay. They ganged up on me! You know, I will do almost anything to get out of a presbytery meeting. By the way, what a great pastor we have as the head of our presbytery. And how many kind people visited me, called me on the phone, and sent me cards and letters. Thank you –it is wonderful to be part of a great congregation. The tests all showed my heart was fine. But in my follow up visit to my doctor he looked at me sternly and waved a boney finger at me and said: “You can either

modify your diet OR I will subject you to a whole series of gastrointestinal tests”, (those were his exact words). And my immediate thought was: “That can’t be pretty.” That was all the motivation I needed. So I began to eat healthily. No fried foods, no fast foods, no rich foods, I can’t even stand the smell of chocolate anymore. No snacking, no potato chips, no donuts. Modest portions; don’t eat too much; don’t eat your dinner after about 6pm. And the kindness in it all was that if I tried to eat something I shouldn’t my stomach would remind me and so I stuck to eating a piece of fish or some grilled chicken. I wasn’t dieting, I was eating healthy. I wasn’t trying to lose weight; I was eating things that were good for me and in amounts and at times where I felt good. It was such a contrast with the last time when I had promised my now dead friend that I would lose weight. This was radically different. This wasn’t trying to deny myself stuff that I wanted. That’s dieting. That doesn’t work for me in the long run. This, rather, was wanting to eat stuff that was good for me. This wasn’t trying to stop doing the wrong thing; this was wanting to do the right thing. Do you hear the difference? And I have to say, without trying, I have lost 40 pounds. I don’t even know exactly how much weight I have lost and I really don’t care because that’s not what its about...I just know when I had my doctor appointment in early July my doctor was doing cartwheels around the office. My test numbers are great; I have energy like I haven’t had in a decade. When I walk up Beau Street for my morning constitutional I walk up the hill without huffing and puffing. Its not about dieting, about denying myself about something; it is about eating right and feeling right. There is a distinction.

Now our scripture from Galatians says this-- *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* (Galatians 2: 20) It is not about “I”. It is not about me. It is not about my attempts to live a good life. It is not about me trying harder to be good. It is not about me trying on my own to fulfill the law. Analogously, it is not about going on a diet and trying to lose weight. Rather, it is about Christ who lives in me. It is about HIM filling me up. It is about filling my life up with good things, like prayer and study and worship. Its about being filled with all the fullness of God. It is about drinking water of the Holt Spirit from which we will never thirst again. It is about hungering and thirsting for righteousness that only Jesus can fulfill in us. It is not about dieting; it is about eating right. Its not about what we don’t do and deny ourselves and try not to do; it is about WHO we place within our heart, WHO fills up our life with good. Its about a diet of Jesus filling up our life to overflow and in ways in which we never hunger and thirst after other things ever again.

Its not about me, that is true. And it is about God; that also is true. But the truest expression of the truth is this –it is about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit filling up our lives. It is about Christ in me...the hope of glory. It is no longer I who have to diet; it is a diet of Christ, who fills up my heart and my life to overflow. *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

That’s the difference between the LAW and the GOSPEL. This whole FALL is about that. So, don’t you want to go on “The Jesus Diet”? And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*