

Sweet Like Honey

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Community Church of Providence

January 26, 2025

Ezekiel 3:1-3

Psalm 19

There's a short documentary that we enjoy watching with our children that shows a day in the life of an astronaut, Sunita Williams, on the International Space Station. Sunita gives the viewers a tour of where she sleeps, how she velcros pens to her pants, how the astronauts exercise and brush their teeth, how the pods of the different countries represented on the station connect into a larger "kitchen" area, with packets of food organized along the walls.

Then she shows us that each astronaut has a special place to keep their own "treats" – items sent by their families to meet their individual and unique cravings. Sunita's special treat sent up from earth, 254 miles into orbit, is something called Marshmallow Fluff – pre-melted marshmallow goo that spreads with a knife, which this astronaut uses to make what she calls "Fluffernutters" – peanut butter sandwiches with marshmallow instead of jelly.

Although the thought of a fluffernutter sounds terrible to me, personally, I'm very pleased that even this serious and physically fit astronaut has an occasional hankering for something like marshmallow goo! I feel better about my own cravings, which are many!

Our scriptures talk often about eating and delighting in what is sweet to taste. Of course, everything our distant ancestors in faith had to choose from was healthful and natural – there was no goo – dates, figs, milk, and, especially, *honey*. Honey is mentioned often in scripture, over 60 times, as an ideal symbol of sweetness – physically, yet also as a metaphor for spiritual fulfillment: we hear about "honey from the rock," "honey on the ground," the "land of milk and honey," and even honey discovered within the decaying bones of a lion.

This past Wednesday, our healthy spirituality group met here at the church, and as a part of our exploration of spiritual disciplines, we prayed while walking a small labyrinth, here in the back of the Sanctuary. Since these texts about the sweetness of scripture were in my mind, I chose during the time of walking prayer to meditate about the sweetness in my life, specifically, I tried to call to mind as many moments of joy as I could, from watching Sand Hill Cranes to holding a new baby on my chest.

I would like to invite you to do that now, also, just briefly, to think of one or two moments of sweetness in your life, deep or simple, recent or far in the past.... Now savor them, like the taste of honey on your tongue.

For me, as I prayed, two memories came to my mind together, as a pair, and yet, in "real" time, they took place decades apart. One was a memory of tromping through the woods behind my grandmother's house as a 5 and 10 year old child, and the other was almost 30 years later, sitting with my grandmother on a sunny porch outside of her nursing home where I used to visit

her several days a week, both of us taking side-by-side naps in our chairs.

Our psalm this morning talks about the words and the teachings of God as something sweet, something delightful, something giving joy to the heart and brightness to our eyes. The psalm says that the law of the Lord revives the soul, rejoices the heart, gives wisdom to the simple, and is sweeter than honey.

The Ezekiel story – also about the sweetness of God’s words – is a strange one, for sure! Ezekiel was a prophet to people living in exile, and God used him to bring them hope for the future. In this text, Ezekiel has a vision of a scroll, a scroll full of words of sadness and mourning, and in the vision God tells him to eat it! (I can’t help but think of my kindergarten teacher instructing us, again and again, not to eat paper.)

Ezekiel eats the scroll, and in his mouth, he says, it becomes as sweet as honey.

Everything that is powerful – religion, education, relationships, technology, government – can be powerful for good or for harm, depending on how we use them – these powerful forces can be life-giving or life-destroying. Speech is one of those powerful things, especially speech that represents God.

We know, from our own experiences, that the words of sermons, and the words of religious people – the interpretation of scripture – can be the opposite of sweet and the opposite of reviving – they can be damaging, even devastating, to our souls. Religious words can be used to marginalize, to condemn, to exclude, to silence, to oppress, to encourage violence.

And we also know the reverse - and this is why we are here - from our own experiences, the sweet balm that the words of faith – sermons and scriptures and conversations – can bring. They can offer peace and renewal, can lift us up when we are discouraged, can show us that we are loved – that we are children of God, honored and chosen – can give us hope and courage and inspire us to do the same for others.

And so our call, as people of Sanctuary – for that is what we are – is vital. Indeed, many people come into our church and into our lives who have been hurt by religion or religious people, so it is imperative that we speak and pray and sing the *sweet* words of God. The real and authentic words of love and true affirmation that come forth from the heart of the God of Love.

The scriptures are not a list of commands nor even a code of ethics, although some of those are found within them - those are but parts; the scriptures are, holistically, the story of people like us, like us, seeking to know God, and they reveal to us, most importantly, the *character* of God: Who God is – the Loving Creator, who covenants and walks alongside, who sees and rescues the banished, who befriends the enemy, who is reflected to us in the radically compassionate life of Jesus.

In a time in which religion is used to justify vitriol and exclusion, even hatred, let us be a witness to something different, a witness to God’s embrace of every person, from their unique creation through every day of their lives, and to the urgent call to care – not for self only – but for one another just as for ourselves. This is the faith we know, and it is sweet as honey.

Amen.