

“Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.”

In other words, it’s better to have a dry crust of bread in peace than a gourmet meal with anger and bickering. I know this is a sobering verse to ponder as we gather for the evening before Thanksgiving.

Yet we need to hear this because 1. (oops!) Society tells us "more" is the key ingredient of the holidays. Are your travel plans ready for tomorrow? Do you have the turkey, the mashed potatoes, and the gravy? The ads are already upon us, Christmas is coming soon. You better be ready with presents wrapped and travel plans finalized. In two days, shoppers will bust down the doors of retail stores nationwide hoping to get a good deal. More Americans know about Black Friday than Good Friday. Then at New Year’s we take it all back, repent of our excesses and try again next year.

2. (ugh!) We start to believe "more" is the key ingredient of the holidays. In order for us to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Years the right way, it needs to be better than last year. And by better we mean more. We start believing the ads and the fantasies delivered to us on television.

We start worshipping the cult of “more.” More turkey, green beans, and pie? Yes! But the more can start to be sneakier and slip into our thoughts and desires. If only your family was more... local. If only your uncle was more... sober. If only your kids were more... normal. If only your sister was more... reasonable. If only there were more... presents.

“More” can turn a mansion into a hut, a family into strangers, and a feast into a famine. It is “more” that turns a house full of feasting into a den of conflict. James writes in his epistle, **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”** What could be or what we think should be can rob us of joy, thanksgiving, and peace.

Our nugget of wisdom from Proverbs might be better translated as, **“Better is a dry morsel with peace than a house full of sacrifices with strife.”** What is likely being referred to here is the Peace offering we read about in our text from Leviticus.

In the Old Testament times, people could offer a peace offering which could be subdivided into three kinds of peace offerings: the thanksgiving, the vow, or the freewill. Thanksgiving offerings were a sacrifice of bread and an animal. Vow offerings were an animal offered when God answered a prayer. Freewill offerings were a gift of an animal as a way of showing thanks for what the Lord had done.

The best thing about these peace offerings were that the person who offered the sacrifice could take some of the meat home to eat with his friends and family. Consider it a kind of thanksgiving feast or a peace dinner.

All this is to say that the Proverb we reflect upon today has a twinge of irony. In other words, the Bible is cautioning us saying, ‘it’s better to have a dry crust of bread with peace than to feast on a peace offering with quarreling.’ A peace offering is no good if there is no peace. A thanks offering is no good if there is no gratitude.

As we wring our hands over plans for tomorrow, as we prepare turkey and all the fixings, as we sweat the guest list and whether or not there will be enough, we always need to keep in mind: **IT'S NOT THE AMOUNT OF FOOD, BUT THE AMOUNT OF THANKS THAT MAKES FOR FESTIVITY.**

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When we make “more” a key ingredient to celebrating the holidays, the result is always going to be disappointment. A key for us to celebrate Thanksgiving properly is to recognize the giver of the gifts. That feasting Solomon talks about in the book of Proverbs is, after all, the leftovers from a gift of thanksgiving given to *God*.

And we find that 3. (aha!) The giver can do amazing things with just a morsel. It doesn’t take a twenty-pound turkey to have a feast. We look to Jesus who gives great gifts. He can do a lot with just a morsel. 4. (whee!) The giver turns a morsel into a feast.

I specifically chose our Gospel text to fit in with our theme. This is the account of the feeding of the 4,000 which is often overshadowed by the feeding of the 5,000 just a chapter earlier. The disciples were worshipping the cult of the “more.” **“And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?””**

When Jesus came up with seven loaves and a handful of fish, the disciples doubts were hardly assuaged. But our text continues, **“he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”** A key here is giving thanks. Our text continues, **“And they all ate and were satisfied.”** The crowd didn’t fall prey to desiring “more.” They were satisfied.

Another example, I visited a homebound member to give her communion, and her elementary school aged grandson watched as I went through the abbreviated communion service. I was explaining to him what happens in communion. I referred to it as a feast. He squinted at what was set out and said, “There sure isn’t much food there!”

But our point is: **IT'S NOT THE AMOUNT OF FOOD, BUT THE AMOUNT OF THANKS THAT MAKES FOR FESTIVITY.** Paul writes, **“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.””** In fact, we sometimes call the Lord’s Supper the Eucharist which comes from the Greek Word to give thanks.

Jesus’ action in our lives instills thanksgiving. By his bloody death and resurrection, he has redeemed us, lost and condemned creatures. He has stilled our strife, so we are no longer quarreling with God. He Himself is our Peace offering which restores a proper relationship with our Heavenly Father.

When God’s people of old would offer a peace offering, they would often sing Psalm 116. Perhaps you’re familiar with it. **“What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.”**

5. (yeah!) The giver opens the floodgate of thanks. As you gather tomorrow, as you make preparations for Christmas celebrations next month, understand the bedrock for a celebration is thankfulness. At its heart, thankfulness is an acknowledgement of how things are, not simply a wishing for more.

Yeah, the turkey might be burned. Your family might be a bunch of goofballs. You might not be able to stand another one of your uncle’s rants or your aunt’s sideways glances. The budget for presents might be kind of tight this year. You may only have a morsel, but a morsel with peace is better than a buffet with conflict.

Tomorrow, like any celebration, is an opportunity to thank Jesus for the way things are, not the way you want them to be. As you consider the fact that your very existence is a gift of God, and not anything that you deserve, the floodgates of thankfulness start to open. As you consider the fact that your eternal salvation is a gift of God, apart from anything you’ve done, you’ll be able to handle long trips in the car, or occasionally unpleasant company. As you consider the feast that is the morsel of bread and the sip of wine as well as all of the many and various ways the Holy Spirit delivers to us His forgiveness, that thanksgiving strengthens you to get through yet another holiday season.

“Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.” **IT'S NOT THE AMOUNT OF FOOD, BUT THE AMOUNT OF THANKS THAT MAKES FOR FESTIVITY.** As we gather tomorrow, let us take the chance to reflect on all the ways God the giver of all good gifts is generous to us!