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Sermon 6 June 2021

Title: Food for Thought 1 (No Substitutions)

- Good morning church, it is so good to be with you this morning—we appreciate so much your joining us today—if you're watching during the LargsNaz Café's Sunday brunch we hope you're enjoying your visit with us and we hope you'll invite a friend or a neighbour to share your table next time—but we are thankful for all of our online viewers and we hope you are blessed by what you see and hear today.
- We are beginning a new sermon series this morning called "Food for Thought." This is the first of six sermons in the series, and during this series we'll be looking at six passages of scripture that, in one way or another, involve food. And as we said last week, there are a great many to choose from—you can hardly open your Bible without landing on a page that has some sort of mention of food—sometimes it's the lack of it—maybe people are wishing they had some or God is providing it during a time when it's hard to find—but food is one of the primary ways that God's provision is illustrated in the Bible—God takes care of his people by making sure that they don't starve to death, and in turn God's people take care of others and show them His love by sharing what God has provided. Food is often at the heart of the way the Christian life is lived out—Jesus even refers to his own body as food—and tells his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood—and we do that symbolically in the sacrament of the Lord's supper as we look forward to that great feast that is coming in the New Jerusalem—but we'll get to all that—or some of it at least--in due course during the series.

- The title of today's sermon is a phrase you may have seen before when you were dining at a restaurant, and it is this: "No substitutions." --- "No substitutions." And what that means is pretty much just what it sounds like—it means that the way an item is described on the menu is the only way that you can order it, you can't make any changes to it or replace an ingredient or a side item with something else that you would prefer—if a hamburger comes with chips, you can't ask for a jacket potato instead, or broccoli or whatever—well, you can ask, but you ain't gonna get it.
- A good friend of ours, Pastor Mike O'hair, he's the Pastor to Families with Teens at Midland Valley church in South Carolina, he has a "no substitutions" policy at the family dinner table—he's worded it a little bit different, though, but it means the same thing—he tells his kids "you get what you get; don't pitch a fit"—I don't know if y'all know what pitching a fit is, but it's complaining and making a fuss and saying you want something else
- Whenever I see "no substitutions" written on a menu, it always strikes me as just a little bit arrogant, or at least obstinate—I think, well who does this chef think he is, or she is—telling me "you get what you get don't pitch a fit"—
- Now I have been to some restaurants, you know, more high end, Michelin-star kind of places with a set menu where what you pay for is a fine-dining experience and you want to be open to the chef's expertise, because they know a lot more about food than I do, and then you don't want to insult their artistic sensibility by asking for ketchup instead of Bernaise sauce, you know, because that would ruin what they're trying to do, and trying to provide for you, so you trust them and you don't deviate from their design--but when you're just at a run-of-the mill restaurant for an everyday lunch or breakfast, just trying to get some sustenance, it's a bit different

- When Pastor Tasha and I were in Glasgow a while back the place we stayed had smoked salmon and scrambled eggs on the breakfast menu—and I have been trying to lose some weight so I’ve been counting my calories—and so, I thought, well, you never know how scrambled eggs have been prepared—they might have a lot of butter and cream in them so they’re really delicious—that’s the way Pastor Tasha makes them—and so I didn’t want to risk all those calories, so I asked if I could have the eggs poached—and they were very accommodating—they said that was no problem, and the poached eggs were delicious—maybe not AS delicious as they would have been if they had been scrambled in butter—but that was an acceptable substitution—just a different way of preparing the eggs—that was reasonable
- But there are some people who seem to have a need to push the limits of what is an acceptable substitution—have you ever known somebody like that? Somebody who doesn’t seem to understand the rationale, who doesn’t “get” what’s acceptable to ask for? The kind of person that you sit down to breakfast with in a restaurant and they might say “I’m trying to get healthy, watch what I eat, I’m just gonna get the avocado toast—the lighter option”
- And then the server comes up to take their order and they say, “Uh yeah, I’m just gonna have the avocado toast—trying to get fit, you know. . . . but uh, instead of avocado could you make that a pork chop? And instead of toast, could ya make that a donut?—(pause)- I’m just having the avocado toast. Getting healthy.”
- Some folks just ignore the menu altogether. They’re the folks you see at Tony Macaroni—and has there ever been a more appropriately-named Italian restaurant than Tony Macaroni?—the national origin of their cuisine is not a mystery—but they’re the folks you see sitting a table at Tony Macaroni and they’re looking over the menu—and

you know what's on it-- there's antipasti and bruschetta and focaccia and pizza Napoli and calzone--- and the server comes around and asks—"Are you ready to order?"-- and they look up from the menu and say "You know I could really go for some Indian—do you all do curry? Tikka masala? Rogan Josh? A nice hot vindaloo?" And you think "that's not even on the menu," this place is called Tony Macaroni, not Johnny Jalfrezi." You can't do that. You can't just make things up. And that is why some menus say very clearly, "NO SUBSTITUTIONS."

- And when you get right down to it—in simple terms, the scriptures that we're looking at and considering today are about an attempt to make a substitution that isn't on the menu
- We heard Pastor Tasha read from Genesis chapter 3 this morning—the familiar story of what happens in the Garden of Eden after the creation—chapter 3 is part of the older creation story that we find at the beginning of the book of Genesis. You may have noticed that the story of creation is told in chapter 1, and then it seems that the story is re-told in Chapters 2 and 3—and that's because that's exactly what happens. What we see in chapter 1 was probably written around 500 years after what's in chapters 2 and 3, and what's in chapters 2 and 3 was probably first written down around 3000 years ago. Three thousand years—that's a long time—but when you consider that this story had been told through the oral tradition before it was ever written down—that people had been telling it to each other and to their children for what could have been hundreds even thousands of years before that—well then you begin to realise what an ancient story we are hearing when we read these words
- There are ancient origin stories in many cultures, stories about where people came from, and how the world and the universe works—many of them are weird and

fantastic—they involve monsters and demons and all sorts of gods and primeval animals—and origin stories don't just answer the question "Where did we, and everything else, come from?" but they also, when they work well, answer questions such as "what are we like?" and "what ought our relationship to the world, to what has been created, and to other people, and to God, be like?"

- And when you think about the fact that when we read the creation stories in Genesis, we are reading origin stories that are thousands and thousands of years old, from a culture very different from ours, then it is a miracle that we can understand them at all, that we would have anything in common with those who told this story so long ago—but when you consider the fact that not only is this story understandable, but it's relatable and applicable to ourselves and to our lives in the 21st century, when you consider that we can see ourselves in this story, that it is as fresh and relevant as today's news, then that is truly mind-boggling, and it is a testament to the power and inspiration and meaning of the scriptures and to the power of the Spirit through which we approach them.
- Now let's look at the situation here in Genesis Chapter 3. We have been told in Chapter 2 that God has created adam—a human being—from the adamah—the soil or the clay—literally that's the red clay like we had back in South Georgia—and God has breathed His ruach, his breath, the breath of life, his Spirit, into the human, and God has put the human in the middle of a garden filled with all sorts of trees for food as well as a tree called the tree of life and a tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and we're told that God has put the human into the garden to till it and keep it—to protect it and preserve it—and God has said that it's permissible to eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—now God has also split this human

into two parts, male and female, *ish* and *ishshah*, Adam and Eve, and that's why a man and a woman become one flesh in marriage, because they were one flesh to begin with. And finally we're told that they were naked, but they were not ashamed.

- Now notice the intimate relationships that have been formed here—these humans have a relationship with God, who provides all that they need, including a vocation, a purpose, and that's to care for creation and all that is in it—that includes each other, and these humans are also related to one another because they are the very same flesh--and they are related to creation as deeply as they could possibly be because it is—the earth is-- the very stuff they are made of—and their calling, that vocation to care for and protect and respect creation includes only one prohibition and that is that they are not to eat the fruit of one particular tree—so this is essentially the law at this point: DO take care of creation and DON'T eat from that tree—eventually there will be ten rules in the Law, and then in time hundreds more as the religious authorities complicate things, but at this point the LAW is quite simple—and
- So these humans, Adam and Eve, have been provided with a sustaining and edifying environment, with companionship, and with a job to do—they have been provided by God with all that they need to be fully human, to fulfil their calling—all is well at the end of Chapter 2
- BUT—Chapter 3 is coming
- And in Chapter 3, as we heard Pastor Tasha read, the crafty serpent, the first theologian, appears. The serpent is called the first theologian because he is the first character in the Biblical narrative to think about and talk about and ask questions about God. That's what theologians do. You might not have ever considered that but it's true.

- And the serpent has a question for Eve. Now notice the craftiness of the serpent—he doesn't ask "Did God tell you not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" he asks " 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from ANY tree in the garden"?'—and even before she answers, Eve must be thinking, "Well, no, God told us to eat from all the trees EXCEPT that one—why would that one be different? Maybe this isn't a necessary rule to follow"—and she begins to question and evaluate and apply her own standards of right and wrong—she is heading in the direction of determining for herself what is good and evil—even before she eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—
- So Eve tells the serpent that God said don't eat from that tree, don't even touch it or you'll die. And the serpent responds—"You will not die, in fact God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil"
- Now notice here that the serpent isn't lying—he's technically right about what he says—Adam and Eve are not going to suddenly drop dead when they eat of that fruit—AND he's right about the fact that they will be LIKE GOD—and he knows that the desire to be like God is a temptation almost too great to resist—but it's not just the temptation to be like God that attracts Eve—she isn't just considering equality with God a thing to be grasped, to use the language of Paul in Philippians 2—verse 6 of Chapter 3 tells us: So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate—
- It wasn't just that she desired equality with God, to have her eyes opened to what's good and evil, but first she saw that the fruit was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes—that is, it was pleasing, it aroused her appetite, it looked like it would give her pleasure to consume—and it would-- and it was fun to look at—that sounds like an

awful lot of things that still arouse us and tempt us in the 21st century, doesn't it? And I think sometimes we may tend to forget that many of the things that God tells us to stay away from, are pleasurable—they look and feel good—that's why they're addictive—I think sometimes the church forgets how much fun sin can be when we present the gospel to folks—the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that there is pleasure in sin for a season—and hedonism, let's be honest about this--the pursuit of pleasure for pleasure's sake, living just to feed the appetites of the flesh, is fun and exciting and pleasurable, and so is consuming what's forbidden, that's why people have affairs and eat too much and abuse substances—it feels good—for a while—because it isn't satisfying—and in time there will be a cost to be paid—that's what the Apostle Paul was talking about in Romans in last week's sermon when he said “if you live according to the flesh you will die” because the wages of sin is death.

- But Eve doesn't concern herself with the cost, and neither does Adam when Eve shares it with him—and he's been right there alongside her the whole time and didn't raise a single objection—
- And what both Adam and Eve are saying through their actions here is this: what God has designed and provided for us is not enough—we would prefer something else—something that looks pretty and tastes delicious and offers us the possibility of rising above our current status—we are going to be led by our desires and our appetites—by our flesh—rather than by the word that God has spoken to us—in other words, this menu that God has given us, even though it includes everything EXCEPT the fruit of that tree, isn't satisfactory—we want more—we want something else—we want something that isn't on the menu, even though God has clearly said “no substitutions.”

- And what happens when they replace God’s provision with their own designs and desires? Those relationships we talked about get broken. When God appears in the garden looking for Adam and Eve, they are afraid and they hide from Him. The one who has created them, who provides for them and cares for them and gives them guidance and purpose has now become a source of fear—and Adam says he hid because he was naked, and indeed verse 7 tells us that the way they see themselves has changed—from bodies of purity and innocence to bodies that are deemed unclean, debased, inappropriate.
- And when God asks Adam directly, “Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat,” Adam’s answer is not simply “yes,” nor does it contain any sense of remorse or repentance, but it points the finger and blames—not only Eve, but by implication God Himself—Adam says “that woman that YOU gave to be with me, SHE did it,” so it’s really YOUR fault--and when Eve is asked what she has done, she in turn blames the serpent, saying that he “tricked” her—even though there was no “trickery involved—and so the relationship between Adam and Eve has degenerated from one of companionship and support and respect into one of accusation and mistrust and fear—all the relationships that Adam and Eve are connected to get damaged—their relationship with God, to each other, to creation, even to their work—they were supposed to “keep” creation, not exploit it, not abuse it, not blame it for their failings--- They had been given a job to do, but got distracted by a tempting argument and their own desires—and they abandoned the work they were called to.
- And so now what? Well now Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden, where they might have eaten from the tree of life and lived forever, but now they can’t—the wages of sin is death, remember—but all is not lost, though Paradise has been, because the

narrative of the Bible from here on out includes time after time God's extending his provision to his people, the descendants of Adam and Eve, through covenants and promises and the Law and prophets. We read again and again of God's redemptive movement toward reconciling the broken relationships that His people find themselves in—with creation, with others and with God

- But time and time again, we see that human nature, the power of the flesh, results in God's provision being met with the same kind of critique and substitution we saw in Adam and Eve—it's not enough or it's not desirable—and so the people fall back into their sin again and again—until finally, the ultimate provision is made by God when He provides his own Son, the one who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, the one who hangs on a tree like fruit and says that his own body is food to be eaten—not to bring condemnation and guilt but to bring forgiveness and holiness
- But for many, a crucified Messiah was just too hard to swallow—it was just too weak and tasteless—they were not satisfied and they would rather substitute something more palatable and powerful—the temptation to be led by the flesh was just too great—BUT for those who accept what God has provided through his Son, there is reconciliation and redemption—there is the opportunity to be led by the Spirit and to be called the children of God
- The actions of Adam and Eve when they ate that forbidden fruit in Genesis chapter 3 have a message for us this morning and I believe it's this— we are better off when we do not substitute our own desires for what God has put on the menu—even though our human nature, and the appetites of our flesh, even our longing to control our situation, may tempt us to do so—inevitably, what God provides is going to lead to life and peace

and joy and abundance, and anything we might substitute is going to be just that—a substitute.

- Now does this mean that we ought to just fatalistically resign ourselves to the way things are and humbly accept every situation in which we find ourselves? Not at all—we are called to change things when they do not reflect God’s will—we are called to build the Kingdom and bring justice and righteousness and love and to be the body of Christ in the world. Accepting God’s provision does NOT mean that we never complain at all, nor does it mean that we don’t let God know how we’re feeling, especially when things aren’t going the way we think they should. Let me illustrate what I mean by this.
- Last week we talked a little bit about Jesus’ prayer in Mark chapter 14, in the garden of Gethsemane, as he faced the trials and torment of the week leading up to the crucifixion. And I think **Jesus** in the garden gives us an example of what we ought to do and how we ought to be that stands in stark contrast to the example set by **Adam and Eve** in the garden, who show us what we ought not to do. Now, we read that in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays ‘Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me’—that is, Jesus is saying to the Father that the cup he has provided is not necessarily the one He would have chosen, and in fact he is clear that he would prefer to substitute something else for it—maybe something a little sweeter, a little less harsh, something that is warm and comforting, or maybe no cup at all would be preferable—but unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus adds, “yet, not what I want, but what you want.” **And those words make all the difference**—Jesus tells the father how he feels, and what he desires, but in the end his feelings and desires do not supersede what God wills—what God has provided. And that’s because Jesus is led not by the flesh, but by the Spirit.

- And we too can be led by the same Spirit—whatever God chooses to serve us, we can say with the Apostle Paul, “in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need” (that’s from Phil 4:12)—whatever God provides for us or calls us to, whatever’s on the menu, we can have peace and joy and abundant life, even life everlasting—because we accept “no substitutions.”