

Below is a sermon that has been written to be used on Adult Education Sunday in conjunction with the other materials in this package. The cover letter in this package explains the ideas and desires behind having such a Sunday in your congregation. The sermon is based on Hebrews 5:5-14. As a Pastor who has received many sermons that could be used for various occasions, I am under no assumption that most of you will preach this sermon in the exact way you receive it. It is hard, and often not wise to preach someone else's sermon. If it fits your style, please use it as it is. If not, I hope it will perhaps give you a metaphor to use in proclaiming this text or at the very least help direct your thoughts when you preach on Adult Education Sunday. An electronic form of this sermon for easy editing can be found at <http://ihoppe.com/aes/>. I can be contacted at pastor@ihoppe.com if I can be of any further assistance to you in your preaching.

-Pastor Philip Hoppe

There is perhaps no more intimate act in the entire world than that of a mother feeding her infant child with her own milk. So strong is the bond that is formed between mother and child during that experience, that the infant can become inconsolable when his or her mother is not with them during those early months of life. Yes, breastfeeding is a beautiful act built into creation by God himself.

And while most doctors consider breastfeeding the best choice for nourishing an infant if it is possible, they do not agree on everything about it. One of the areas of disagreement is the question of how long one should nurse their infant. Some suggest as little as three months while most suggest somewhere around a year. In some cultures, it is not uncommon for children to be nursed until they are two or three. But you know what all cultures and all doctors agree unanimously on when it comes to nursing? This: Nursing is only for a time. It must come to an end. Children must stop nursing so that they can learn to eat other foods which contain the things they need to develop into functioning adults.

Inside the church, we have a very odd situation occurring indeed. And more than odd, it is downright disturbing. There are many people in the church scattered throughout the world that are still nursing even though their birth certificate would conclusively suggest that they should be well beyond such things.

Of course, I am no longer talking about literal nursing. Rather, I speak about spiritual nourishment. Many of God's people it seems are simply content to continue nursing their whole life long. They are content to know only the basics of the faith. They are content to never experience what it means to live in the fullness of Jesus' resurrection. They act as spiritual infants throughout their Christian life.

This action is disturbing because it is sinful. We all are born indeed as spiritual infants at the font where Word and water meet to create new life. And it is only right for a while that we would live as spiritual infants. Most Lutheran churches essentially feed milk to their spiritually young all the way through confirmation class, whether that be in eighth grade or later in life. And that is completely appropriate. But nursing is only for a time. The nursing must come to an end.

Why? Because the scriptures are filled with truths more solid than milk that must be consumed if one is to attain maturity in the faith. As we grow, we receive from God the teeth we need to devour more solid food. And He intends for them to be put to use.

A general truth is this, solid food requires chewing. Sometimes in worship here on Sunday mornings, the truths we focus on are milk and therefore are easily digested. Other times more solid food is presented, but there is simply not enough time to chew it all up. In this case, some spit it out while others swallow it whole, neither truly receiving the benefit of it all.

And that is why setting aside longer periods of time to meditate upon the Bible is so important. Personal devotions are one place where such digestion can take place. But perhaps the best settings for such chewing on solid food are those places where Christian people gather together for study. When we gather together, we are given a perfect setting in which to grind through the meat of the scriptures. Sometimes that gnawing happens here at church on Sunday mornings in bible studies. Other times it happens in homes when families gather and questions and answers are traded. Still other times the

chewing occurs [add your own local opportunities, i.e. midweek, confirmation, LWML groups, whatever.]

But the sad fact is this. Most of the members of Lutheran congregations do not attend any of these activities. Across the state of Kansas, only about 11% of those Lutherans who attend church are involved with any formal bible study during the week. Our statistics here at [church name] are right around those numbers as well [adjust for accuracy]. That suggests that 90% of us are simply content with nursing. We are satisfied living without solid food. And that makes for a weak body of Christ in this place. We need solid food inside of us in order that we would be strong on the whole. Put more simply, we need more Jesus inside of us in order that we move with strength as His Body in this world.

And yet some proceed with apathy towards the idea of spiritual maturity and therefore remain infants. Others fear the process of searching and learning that leads one into maturity and that causes pause in their spiritual growth. But whatever the cause, the result is the same. The body without solid food is a body that does not walk upright with the strength it should.

God knew this well when He spoke to the Hebrews through the words penned by the book's author. And as He beheld the Hebrews, He was disappointed with what He saw. When He looked at those people, He saw that most of them were still nursing on milk instead of desiring and devouring solid food. He said that they should be teachers in the faith, but instead were barely students. And so He called them to repentance. He called them to confess that they had been acting like children despite the many years of new life they had already experienced by His grace.

And He calls us to repentance today as well. That is why we have set aside this day to focus on the state of adult Christian education in our congregation. In just a few moments [adjust to your plan], you will be given an assessment to fill out today. Its first purpose is to help reveal the sin of spiritual immaturity among us caused by the lack of spiritual meat-eating so that it can be confessed to our God. And secondarily, though just as importantly, it is given to help guide our actions here so that each member of our church might be encouraged to begin to eat solid food with joy, knowing that God's grace is received through such holy eating. And ultimately not only that we would begin to eat it, but continue to eat it our entire lives.

God teaches us again today that it is for our good that we would mature in the faith from chewing on His Word. He promises that the taste will be wonderful and the effect on our souls will be astonishing. Sin will be forgiven and life engendered in us. We will grow up into him who is our head. We will leave behind childish ways and attain to the full maturity of faith.

And with promises like those, how can we continue to simply be content with nursing, with living on milk alone? Today as God's promises reach our mouths, their offer of God's kindness leads us to repentance. Today, we confess our lazy attitudes towards devouring the meat of God's word. We own up to our fears about what the adult Christ life will mean for us if we truly seek it. We admit that we are not as mature in our faith as we ought to be. And we admit that our immaturity is the direct result of our not taking advantage of every opportunity to study God's Word.

And our confession is met again by the forgiveness of our gracious God. It is met in words of forgiveness spoken today by God through my mouth. And it is met with that same forgiveness as we receive His body and blood in His Supper. Yes, God feeds to us the milk of the gospel which reminds us that all our sins, even the neglect of His Word, are forgiven because of Jesus' death. And then He gives us to eat all of the solid food of the Gospel, filling our hearts with all the knowledge of how truly blessed we are to have our God and his Word.

Nursing is quite natural for infants. The same is true for spiritual infants. But nursing must end. It is only for a time. This is true for infants both physical and spiritual. Today we hear again God's invitation to feast on solid food. As He first bid through Isaiah to His people of old, He speaks to us again today, "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." (Isaiah 55:2) Taste and see. The Lord is good. Amen.