

[BLANK] [PRAYER] I hope that you're having a good Fall so far. The field that I drive past on the way to church is reminding me that Fall is certainly with us, now. [FIELD] The corn is being harvested, row by row, and the stubble is replacing the stalks that grew extra-tall this Summer. There was so much rain this summer that it was hard not to grow things [FLOWERS] I see flowers in my garden that I don't remember planting - they must have popped up from seeds that I tried last year! When the conditions are right, life can be abundant.

Yet, conditions for life are not right, everywhere, and not necessarily where you think. [DESERT] The driest deserts in the world are not in Africa, or the Middle East, or China, but in Antarctica. Antarctica gets less snow and rain in a typical year than the Sahara Desert, and there are places there where there has been no snow or rain in hundreds of thousands of years, perhaps even millions of years. Scientists go to these places to study why life on Mars is so hard to find. [BLANK]

When we have what gives life, life is abundant. And when we don't, it's not. It's a simple story, yet a story with life-or-death consequences. If we want life, then we must feed ourselves the things that give us life. If we don't have those things, we die. [JUNK FOOD] The old saying goes, "You are what you eat." If we keep eating things that affect our health, including my favorite, grits and bacon, then we can expect a less healthy life. If we keep eating things that give our bodies the best chance of being healthy, then we can expect a more healthy life, all things being equal. Pretty simple, right? [BLANK]

Yes, it is simple. But simple isn't always easy. I am just starting to get back into more healthy eating and exercising after a very hard year. I can feel the effects. I haven't taken care of my body in a Godly way as much as I should. And it affects my spirit. John Wesley, the key founder of Methodism, was very aware of the connection between our spiritual life and our physical life. [BOOK] Wesley studied and practiced the use of herbal medicines, a key part of his early ministries to the sick and the poor. Wesley's interest in these cures set the stage for early Methodists building hospitals across this nation, and around the world. Part of walking the talk of Methodism is caring for our bodies as God's creations. [BLANK]

Healthy bodies - they're easy to understand, even if we're not always doing what we should to "walk the talk." But do we really understand the effects of our lifestyles on our spiritual lives? We can't escape being physical creations of God, and it is equally true that we can't escape being spiritual creations of God. If we try to take care of our bodies without taking care of our spirit, we aren't really the creations that God has meant us to be. But how do we do that? How do we feed both our spiritual being and our physical being in a Godly way?

The truth is that for most people, that combination of physical and spiritual holy living doesn't come naturally to us. And it's not so much the difference between ordering a chili dog or ordering a heart-healthy omelette as it is what's at the root of our desires. What we desire determines what grows in us. What we plant our lives in, determines what comes out of us. Last Sunday, our reading from James, an early Christian

leader, said that olives don't grow in fig trees, and salt water won't come from a fresh water spring. What we plant ourselves in determines how we treat ourselves and others.

This Sunday, our reading from James turns to why James has been using these simple comparisons to guide Christian disciples. He uses them because people who should know better are not getting the Christian message. James can see that people in the early Christian community were paying lip service to a spiritual life, but had lives rooted in things other than the life-giving love of Jesus. And the fruits of that hypocrisy were not sweet. James notes in the opening of Chapter 4 of his letter, [QUOTE] "What is the source of conflict among you? What is the source of your disputes? Don't they come from your cravings that are at war in your own lives?"

James nailed it. James saw the problem with claiming to be a Christian committed to peace, but having a heart at war, a war of satisfying cravings that lead to hurtful and selfish actions. [BLANK] How many times have we heard sad stories of kids in schools being murdered, because a child was jealous of another student's new clothes or jewelry? How many shootings in this nation, and around the world, are tied to hearts that are at war, a war that turns people, living, breathing creations of God, into objects that stand between a spiritually sick person's desires, and their selfish satisfactions?

And how many times, in ways both big and small, do we find our own hearts rooted in war, and not in the peace that passes all understanding that comes only from God, only from God's river of life, that flows from God, through faith in Jesus Christ? How many times do we pray for the help of God's Holy Spirit, only to find that we're asking for pure and holy water, when our roots are stuck in the water of our desires, driven by our own fear and greed?

You see, Christianity is not simply a belief in God. Anyone can believe something. Anyone can claim an allegiance, or follow a law. But Christianity is more than that. [TREE] Christianity is a discipline, a willingness to allow God to uproot our lives, to let God replant us where God can feed our hearts with God's peace, that flows from God's love for us in Jesus Christ. There's a temptation in our faith lives to think that wherever we are is where God has meant us to be planted. And, unfortunately, many translations of our Bible can help to reinforce this idea. Psalm 1 is translated often into English to describe a tree that someone has planted by life-giving streams. But our Common English Bible translation reflects the original language of the Bible more closely, when it says that this tree was not just planted there, but re-planted. God gives us life, but God knows that what will give us a complete life, a life that allows us to celebrate God both in our bodies and in our spirits - that kind of life requires a conscious, life-changing effort to move closer to the heart of God, closer to God's life-giving peace in Jesus Christ.

[BOOK] This coming Saturday, at the Meriden Public Library, I will be leading the first peacemaking workshop in this city sponsored by our church. It's based on the book "The Anatomy of Peace," a book that has been used by the global leaders of The United Methodist Church to help them find a peaceful way forward for our church, as they try to address questions of how diverse people around the world are included into Christian

fellowship. I hope that our workshop helps people to learn how to have hearts that are at peace, and not at war. The truth of the matter is that The United Methodist Church is still a work in progress in applying these peace-making principles. You can read a book about peace, but if your heart is at war with others, then there will be no peace. You can go to church on Sunday and pray for peace, but if you're not ready to go home and make peace, to be the peace, then there will be no peace. [BLANK]

If you are longing for the peace of God in your life, then you must allow yourself to be re-planted by God, away from the things that feed your hearts going to war with others, and with God. You are what you eat. You are what you drink. If you eat the culture of death that is sold by the bucketful in the world, then your heart and soul will die. If you claim to love God, and drink the passions of war with this one, or the other one, because you refuse to be re-planted by God as a peacemaker in the image of Christ, then Christ is just a piece of jewelry, that you can take on and off as you please, a passion of convenience.

To be a Christian, we go down to the river to pray, down to the river that washes away our sins, down to the river that creates peace, abundance, and hope. To be a Christian, we practice eating Christ, and drinking Christ, every time that we have Holy Communion, as a reminder that, every moment of our lives, God has meant for us to eat Christ, and drink Christ, through God's Holy Spirit, to be re-planted as God's church on earth. We are what we eat. We are what we drink. If we drink from the life of Christ, then Christ lives, and we have God's peace. If we drink from the world of death, then Christ dies in us, and we will have only the world of war. It is a simple idea. It is not easy to do. And it is why we need one another as Christian disciples, to do this together, as a people seeking to be re-planted forever by the waters of Christ. Without this, we're just a hymn-singing social club. God has meant us to be more than that. Go down to the river; the river of life. Amen.