Eating Together: Week 11

I have been drawn to two passages in the Bible which mention food, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. The first is in the book of Daniel. Daniel had been taken to Babylon with many others from Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted some young Israelites – men who were healthy, handsome, intelligent, well-educated and good prospects for leadership positions. The king ordered that the men who had been selected be served the same menu as the royal table – in other words they were going to be well fed with good food and wine – Nebuchadnezzar was prepared to treat them well. However, one of these young men – Daniel, asked to be exempt from the royal diet. He may have resolved not to eat the food because some items were forbidden by Jewish law or because accepting the king’s food and drink was taking him closer to a culture that did not honour God. (Daniel 1 v8). Daniel resolved to stick to his principles and live a life of obedience to God, even if that got him into trouble. The king’s steward was worried that Daniel and his friends would become less healthy on a diet of vegetables and water but in fact they looked better and more robust that all the other young men who had been eating from the royal menu. David stuck firmly to honouring God which got him into lots of trouble – but he survived the fiery furnace, and the lions’ den and he received visions and wisdom from God. The book of Daniel is just 12 chapters and is an interesting read.

In contrast, in the Book of Acts (chapter 10) we read about Peter having a puzzling dream. While he was waiting for lunch he had a vision of something that looked like a huge blanket being lowered to the ground by ropes at its four corners. On it was every kind of animal, reptile and bird and a voice came saying “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” Three times this happened, and each time Peter said “Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” While this was happening a devout centurion called Cornelius (a gentile) had sent servants to Peter, telling him that an angel had told Cornelius to send for Peter so that Cornelius and his family could hear what Peter could tell them about Jesus. So on this occasion, God is showing Peter that everything Peter had learnt as a good Jew was being turned upside down. Further on in the New Testament Paul suggests that fellowship amongst all those who followed Jesus meant there would be occasions when those who had been Jews would not follow the strict food laws because they were mixing with non-Jews.

So, the big question is, how do we know what God is really telling us in any given situation. In these passages Daniel, Peter and Cornelius were all people who lived close to God and they seem to have been blessed with clear messages. A respected way to check ‘messages from God’ is to ask   
(1) does it follow what we read in the Bible,   
(2) what reaction do we get from talking to trusted friends,   
(3) to pray about it.

Daniel was prepared to die rather than disobey God’s way of living. Peter had to relinquish much that he had thought important and this is what led to gentiles (which includes us) receiving the good news of Jesus.

*Produced by Daphne Wilkins on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*