

You are what you \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
A sermon for August 28, 2016  
Jeremiah 2:4-13  
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

This morning I'd like to focus in on one verse from this morning's readings. It's found in the second chapter of Jeremiah-- the fifth verse: Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

The title for my sermon has a blank in it. Let's fill it in together with the first thing that comes into your mind. You are what you ... ?

Most of us have probably heard this phrase hundreds of times. We don't really like to think about it, of course, but most of us, if pressed, would probably confess that there is some truth to it. If you put junk in, you'll end up being made out of junk.

Now, I love junk food. I've never met something in a half-full, semi-inflated chip bag that I didn't like. Potato Chips, Tortilla chips, Cheetos, Cheese curls, Fritos, Bugles, Pretzels, funions, hot fries, Sun chips (They're "sun" chips, because they're healthy, like the sun... which gives you cancer). Then there's bark thins-- oh, you don't know? They're branded as-- I'm not kidding about this-- "snacking chocolate." I *love* all of them!

Of course, I could survive without all of these. We all know that "they're just empty calories." But actually it's a lot worse than that, isn't it? It's

not just the fact that they're low in nutrients that gets them labeled "junk food." It's that they're actually high in things that aren't good for me, like saturated fat. They're not just a poor substitute for real food, they actually do me harm.

Why do I love junk food so much then? From the fat, to the salt, to the MSG, these products are perfectly engineered not just to be tasty, but to urge me to eat *more*. My brain says, "ok, you should be done with Cheetos" but the MSG just tells my brain, "no, eat more!" Junk food exploits a core part of who I am as a human being.

I am created to eat food. Food is indeed meant to give me the nutrition that I need to flourish physically. But junk food simply tricks my brain into thinking it's getting what it needs, without actually delivering on the promise. Food, which was **intended to enable me to be the best human I can be, instead causes *harm* to my body.**

Let's take this to an extreme before bringing it back around to the scripture. Alcohol, as you may know, is actually quite full of calories. So much so, that some alcoholics can feel full without ever actually eating any food. It's a horrible situation, actually, because these people can actually end up malnourished to the point of irreversible brain damage.

Now if such a person were to come to *you*-- you, a person that can look into their life from outside of the disease, and say, "I feel fine! There's no problem with me!" would you believe him? Of course you wouldn't! You'd know that he needed to sober up and eat right in order to not drink himself to death.

Of course all of this has great spiritual parallels with the scripture that we're focusing on this morning.

Perhaps the greatest, most persistent problem of God's people in scripture their tendency toward idolatry-- worshipping an aspect of creation rather than worshipping creation's creator. That is the practice that is being condemned in this second chapter of Jeremiah, with the strong words, "they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves."

They've been consuming spiritual junk, and they're becoming junk themselves. This points us to a fundamental spiritual law that I'd like to explore this morning: You become like what you worship. **You are what you love.**

Worship the true God and Lord of all creation in spirit and in truth, and you will come to share in the glory of God. But worship idols, and you will become empty, being you are seeking after things that are empty.

And here's the thing: just as I was created to be nourished and shaped by food, I was also created to be nourished and shaped by worship. And our nature abhors a vacuum. What I mean is that our desire for worship must always be fulfilled. We always worship something. Our spirits are always directed at acknowledging and praising the worth of something or someone.

Earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus talked about unclean spirits wandering around and looking for a place to house themselves. If they find a vacant resting place in someone, they take up residence. (See Lk 11:24-26).

Jesus is pointing us to the reality that if you're not filled up with the true and living God, you'll be filled up with something else, and it will destroy you. Worshipping God moves you to be fulfilled and complete as a human, but filling the human need for worship elsewhere starves your spirit and destroys you.

We have to pay attention to this reality. Just as most of us can look on the starving alcoholic's situation from the outside, Jesus is able to look in on *our* diseased condition of false worship from *outside*.

“But I feel fine! There's nothing wrong with me!” If you're honest with yourself, don't you realize that your spirit is starving apart from God?

There is a big problem here. Not only do we spiritually starve ourselves apart from the worship of God, but apart from God, our lives are so shaped by false worship that we find ourselves enslaved to it.

We might not fashion images of animals or humans to worship. But how often do we worship the idol of power, the idol of sex (or lust), the idol of money. We *love* these things. They're the object of our desires.

Sure, there are those who choose other gods-- and of course there are quite a range that we might select from. But each of them forms us and shapes us, because worship transforms us. We become like what we worship.

Little by little the one who worships money sees the world primarily in terms of potential financial gains and losses. This is the driving force in their life. And as we spoke about a few weeks ago, the god of Money

promises ultimate fulfillment and safety, but only delivers insatiable greed and fear. You are what you love.

The one who worships Power seeks greater power for themselves while seeing the rest of the world as a threat to their own power. The rest of humanity, therefore, becomes the means to win authority-- a mere tool to be exploited for their own gain. We become like what we worship.

And then there is lust. The one who worships this god sees the world only in terms of potential partners and potential rivals. Even as they boast of their current conquest, they yearn for another, different one. Their hearts are directed toward their own gratification, and this becomes the purpose of all existence. They think that they are pursuing fulfillment, but in fact, they are sowing the seeds for their own spiritual destruction. You are what you love.

This isn't simply choosing one or many options from the buffet. This is exchanging life-giving nourishment for junk food which is served on a silver platter by an enemy in order to cause your spiritual death.

And it's not simply a personal choice-- a victimless crime. Idols always require blood sacrifice, and rarely will the blood demanded be your own. As is the case in worshipping money, power, and sex, as we become like the objects of our worship, we will find ourselves harming others in pursuit of the things that our hearts actually truly desire. Our own fulfillment is always more important than the fulfillment of others. The loss of others is our gain. *They* get in the way of *my* true fulfillment. *They* are the enemy, and I am the victor.

God mourns in verse 11 of Jeremiah 2: “my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit.”

God’s people could have chosen to faithfully worship God, but instead they chose the empty, deadly calories of spiritual junk food. They thought themselves wise and full, but in fact, they were foolish and empty.

You are what you love. This is the consistent and frequent witness of scripture.

From Hosea chapter 9, “they came to Baal-peor [that’s the god of the nation of Moab], and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, **and became detestable like the thing they loved.**”

Again in Psalm 115: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.... Those who **make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.**”

From Romans chapter 1: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...” “reasoning became pointless, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21 CEB)

What do you love? What do you trust in? What is the truest desire of your heart? What do you worship? Who-- or what!-- are you becoming like?

If you find that it is not the God revealed in Jesus, then you have a problem. Your spirit is taking in junk. This is simply the reality of existing as a human being. The problem is made worse, however, because although these objects of your misplaced worship seem innocuous enough, they now hold you captive. They are a slave-master and you are the slave. And you are powerless on your own to be freed from their oppressive rule.

You know what I'm talking about. When you want to be freed from the idol of Money, you find its promises of safety and security entice you. Its promises of fulfillment constrain you. Your heart yearns for rest in just a little be more, but there is no rest. It's spiritual junk.

Or you want to be free from the idol of Lust, but you find your thoughts, affections, desires and loves directed toward someone that you cannot have. You try to change your mind, but you find yourself powerless to overcome your desires.

Or you want to be free from the endless pursuit of power, but your ambition blinds you. The thought of renouncing what you've gained seems irresponsible, even though you know that it's killing your spirit.

As it turns out... we need a savior. We need someone who can not only see our disease for what it is, but we need someone who has the power to overcome the powers that enslave us-- to set us free. We need nothing less than the God of Israel, who set Pharaoh's slaves free so that they could worship God on Mt. Sinai.

But this is where the good news begins, isn't it? This very same God took on human flesh in Jesus the Messiah. In his life, he taught us and showed us what a human life looks like when it is lived in constant worship of the only one who is worthy of it. In his death, he took on himself the violence that idolatry always brings. In Christ's death, God's Kingdom overcomes the rogue kingdoms and powers that ensnare us.

And when we put our trust in Christ, when we call out to God for liberation, Christ sets *us* free from their grip. Christ rescues us from our selfish and worthless desires, and liberates us to worship God in spirit and truth.

But the good news doesn't end there. You become like what you worship. You are what you love. Even as Jesus evicts from us the evil spirits that have taken up residence in our hearts, God the Father sends the Holy Spirit into the newly vacated space. We become filled with the very presence of God, and we are cleansed from the inside out.

We find our desires reshaped. We realize how empty our pursuits were apart from Christ. We become witnesses to the truth that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.

So we continue to worship Christ, the image of the God who saves us. And as Paul says in 2 Corinthians, we are "transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." Worship the King of Glory, and find yourself taking on God's glory.

And as we worship the crucified Messiah whom God raised from the dead, we act more and more like Jesus. We don't put ourselves at the



high seats, but we humble ourselves before God in the hope that God will lift us up, just as God exalted Christ in his resurrection.

This is the God that we worship in this place. The one who lowered himself to the point of death, so that as God lifted him up, God would lift us up too. We *will* become like what we worship. Who, or what, are you becoming?