

Summer Sermon Series: The Biblical Messages of Dr. Seuss

“Green Eggs and Ham or Eat this...”

Exodus 16:2-3, 11-15; John 6:28-40; Ephesians 4:1-6

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This is the third sermon in the Summer Sermon Series on “The Biblical Messages of Dr. Seuss.” The idea came from two books I received as a gift for receiving my doctorate. These books examine the theological themes in these beloved children’s stories. Theodore Seuss Geisel, the name of the man whose pen name is Dr. Seuss, had an uncanny gift to take complex adult themes and with very few words that rhyme simplified these themes so children could understand them. Ted Geisel never thought of himself as a super Christian, but his storytelling does have a Christian orientation. Today we will look at the beloved *Green Eggs and Ham*.

I was a finicky eater as a child. Hard to believe now, I know. My grandmother could not get me to eat anything green. Vegetables were not part of my diet in any way shape or form. Today nutritional experts say that if you have a child help to plant the vegetables and cook them that they will eat them. Not so with me! We had a garden. I helped with the planting, weeding, harvesting, and preserving of the vegetables, but that didn’t mean I would taste spinach, peas, green beans, or anything else that was green. My grandmother was so worried that I wasn’t receiving the proper nutrition that she consulted the doctor. He told her not to worry that when I was ready to eat them I would. Now that didn’t stop her from trying to coerce me or try new ways to get me to eat vegetables. I don’t remember when I began to eat them, but I did. Today I love to eat green vegetables in salads or as a side dish.

But green eggs? Reminds me of St. Patrick’s Day when people add green food coloring to everything from beer to cake icing. The color green just doesn’t belong in some foods. As I reread *Green Eggs and Ham* this week, I was wondering how Ted Geisel came up with the concept of using green eggs and green ham (because the pictures in the book show green ham, too.) Why green? Why eggs? Why ham? He could have used just about anything to illustrate how persistence pays off when you want someone to try something new, but green eggs and green ham are odd enough that the concept works. To refresh your memory of the story, there is a character, Sam-I-Am, who just shows up. There is little person with no name who decides without knowing anything about Sam-I-Am that he doesn’t like him at all. Then Sam-I-Am asks the unnamed character if he likes green eggs and ham. He does not. Sam-I-Am asks again and again in different ways on each page of the book. Would you eat them in a box, with a fox, in a house, with a mouse, on a boat, with a goat, in the rain, on a train, here or there? Each time the little person reiterates that he would not eat them with or in any of Sam-I-Am’s suggestions. And each time he restates that he does not like green eggs and ham. But Sam-I-Am doesn’t give up.

Can you think of a time that you tried a food for the first time? Was it in another country? Or at a friend’s home? Or at an ethnic restaurant? Sometimes the training of military personnel has them foraging in the wilderness to eat whatever they can find or capture. The Israelites had this dilemma. They had escaped slavery in Egypt where there was an abundance of food to being stuck in a wilderness where there was nothing to eat. However, God provided. Quail fell out of the sky for them to eat. And each morning there was “man-hu.” Eugene Peterson in his interpretation, *The Message*, uses the exact word that the Israelites exclaimed when they saw the white substance on the leaves of the plants, man-hu. It means “What is it?” They had never seen it, much less eaten it. When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, they used the word manna instead of man-

hu. Not only did the Israelites not know what it was, they had never eaten it before. But necessity and hunger became the mother of new recipes. The little person in *Green Eggs and Ham* may have needed a little more convincing to try it, than the Israelites needed to eat manna. God provided the Israelites what they needed, food. BTW, botanists have found plants in this area that produce an edible white substance.

It is this manna or “What is it?” that Jesus refers to in the Gospel of John. Earlier in the chapter the disciples had participated in the feeding of the thousands with just a few loaves of bread and fish. The next day the people come back hungry and Jesus tells them not to waste their time on food that doesn’t last, but they are to focus on the food that will last for eternity that the Son of God will give to them. The disciples want to know how they can receive this kind of food. Jesus says all they have to do is believe in him. As God gave manna in the wilderness, God will give them bread from heaven to eat. Then he announces that he is the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to him, whoever believes in him will never be hungry or thirsty. Bread of Heaven. Bread of Life. What is that bread recipe? It is the recipe of love. That recipe binds everyone who receives it together as one. Paul describes the ingredients for this bread in the Ephesians’ passage. They are humility, gentleness, patience, and acceptance.

We live in a world that is hungry for this type of bread. There are some who don’t even know that this kind of bread can exist. How do we as Christians be like Sam-I-Am? How do we keep finding more and more creative ways to ask people to try the green eggs and ham of faith? Loving someone, accepting someone who is different from ourselves, being patient with someone who has a different political viewpoint, being gentle with someone who is angry is very challenging. Isn’t it? Yet as Christians we are called to share the hope we have in Jesus the Christ, the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins so we can have a life filled with hope and joy as well as the hope of eternal life. Loving people is not easy. It forces us out of our comfort zones. It diverts our attention from ourselves to others. When we actively, consciously, intentionally love others, we will go beyond our own sphere into theirs. This may take us to someone’s doorstep, into a laundromat, a playground, or a coffee shop. What does this kind of loving look like? It may be striking up a conversation about whatever the person is doing, thinking, or struggling with at the moment. Acts of loving include finding ways to help, to be a friend, to do the loving thing in the relationship. There are people all around us who are longing for someone to show them that there is One who can love them, One who can care for them, One who welcomes them, and One who can be in relationship with them. And that One for us is Jesus. We as Christians are to be Jesus to them.

Oh, I didn’t tell you how the Green Eggs and Ham story ends. After Sam-I-Am tries many different ways to invite the little person to try eating them, he finally does and he likes them! He joyously states he will eat them in all the suggested ways and places that Sam-I-Am offered. And he thanks Sam-I-Am for his invitation. When we are being the like the Bread of Life to someone who is hungry for life, just keep inviting them to try it. They just might and like it, too. And when it happens, we are to give all the thanks to the Bread of Life.

Reflection Questions: To whom are you being called to be a Sam-I-Am? How can you keep offering them the love of Christ and inviting them to taste the Bread of Life?

Resources: *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss; *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss* by James Kemp; “Ways to Love,” by Connie Cole Jeske, *The Circuit Rider*