

It wasn't until 1906 when the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed by Congress that foods had to be labeled with their actual ingredients. And the industry has been stretching the truth ever since. Part of the motivation for the act was simple falsehoods: many jars of Ketchup were merely red food coloring and pumpkin. More ominous were those foods that contained harmful ingredients or ingredients that has started to rot or were contaminated with all sorts of unhealthy items.

But for every step forward there are people who will find a way to side step the regulations. Unfortunately this continues today, over 110 years after the Food and Drug Administration was established.

Perhaps you really like bacon, perhaps just a few bits of bacon on a salad or a baked potato. Here you need to be careful. There are Real Bacon Bits and Bacon Bits and Bac'n Pieces. The first two do contain bacon, along with many additional ingredients. But a vegan could be happy with Bac'n Pieces; they contain zero meat products. The very careful use of an apostrophe replacing the 'o' in bacon allows McCormick to defend this rather curious trademarked name and an ingredients list with void of bacon.

Likewise, there is absolutely no truth to the idea that Froot Loops contain any fruit. Again, the careful choice of spelling implies a healthy ingredient which simply doesn't exist.

I am not trying to indict the entire food industry nor imply that they are the only ones that tend to be creative with the truth. One could even say that 'creatively' representing the truth, or at least avoiding labeling untruths as such, has become a national pastime.

An old army saying is that there is no horse too dead to beat.

So why am I perhaps overdoing this topic? Because our faith is dependent upon knowing and understanding that which is truth.

In our passage from First Timothy Paul states: "God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He goes on to state: "I am telling the truth, I am not lying."

In a sense, Paul has given us the 'ingredients list' of Jesus. This is the real thing, no intentional misspelling to avoid claims of false advertising. No misleading claims. Just the simple, all inclusive claim that Jesus is: Mediator. Human. Ransom. These are some remarkable claims.

First, Jesus is Mediator. Paul is determined to speak the truth about Jesus, the "one mediator between God and humankind" (v. 5). A mediator is someone who stands in the middle of two parties and tries to make peace between them. In order to achieve reconciliation, he must have some form of a

relationship with the two parties.

This is why the Apostles' Creed says that Jesus is God's "only Son" -- that is his relationship to God. And the creed also says that he is "our Lord" -- that is Christ's relationship to us.

Only Son. Our Lord. Jesus has a unique relationship with both God and us.

Standing between God and us, Jesus is able to do this work because he is trusted by both sides to be an effective mediator and pull us together. He knows that there is a huge gap between God's perfection and our imperfection, between God's power and our weakness, between God's holiness and our sinfulness, between God's graciousness and our selfishness. Only Jesus can stand between us. Only Jesus can bridge this gap. Only Jesus can bring us together.

2nd ingredient: Jesus is human.

For Paul, Jesus is an authentic human, not an artificial product like Froot Loops. The true humanity of Jesus helps him to identify with us and really help us in our struggles. The letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus is able to "sympathize with our weaknesses" (4:15); because "he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested" (2:18).

The humanity of Jesus enables him to be with us in all of the difficulties we face. He is beside us, just as he was beside people for most of his earthly life.

The English priest Samuel Wells has written a book called *A Nazareth Manifesto*, in which he reminds us that Jesus spent most of his life in the town of Nazareth, simply living with people. The stories of the gospels are focused mostly on the end of his life on earth, leaving out the early years during which he was simply "Immanuel," the name which means "God with us."

"Jesus is Immanuel before he is Savior," writes Wells. "By overcoming our isolation, Jesus saves us." So this second ingredient in the make-up of Jesus is that he is truly human, right beside us, sympathizing with our weaknesses and helping us when we are tested.

Jesus gave himself as a ransom.

The apostle Paul understands that we are all captives to our sinfulness. We can try to change our ways, fix our mistakes and get ourselves on the right track, but our efforts are always going to fall short. In his letter to the Romans, Paul admits his own frustration when he says, "I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (7:14-15).

Those words ring terribly true, don't they? We are slaves to sin and need to be rescued. Fortunately, says Paul, Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" (v. 6). Jesus took personal action to buy us

out of slavery. For our redemption. To be our ransom. Innocent Jesus died so that all of us could be rescued, forgiven and made right with God.

Jesus, the real thing. Accept no substitutes nor tricky spelling nor trademarked but false advertising.

How should we respond to this? Paul urges us to pray for everyone, since God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (vv. 1-4). We can talk with others about what we have discovered, following in the footsteps of Paul, who saw himself as "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (v. 7). And we can "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (v. 2), much as Jesus did when he lived with people in Nazareth.

Yet there is a danger in overly stressing a quiet and peaceable life. The early Christians who followed the radical teachings of Jesus were targeted for discrimination and abuse by the society around them. We do not face such pressure. If anything, we have become too peaceful in that we do not embody the radical message of God's love for all; yes, God loves Republicans and Democrats, God loves native Americans, those of us who have arrived from foreign shores, those who are still seeking to arrive. Do we reflect God's unequivocal love for all of those around us?

Never underestimate the value of simply living with people and sharing their struggles. When Samuel Wells (mentioned above) was dean of Duke University Chapel, he led ministries in which people from the chapel did not try to reach out and save the poor. Instead, they "lived with their neighbors. They broke bread, chatted on the porch and at the bus stop with neighbors, and discovered the good that was already being done in the neighborhood."

According to Wells, the word 'with' is the most important word in Christianity. Immanuel means God with us, and from his birth to his ascension Jesus saw his mission as being with us. Our challenge as Christians is to be with God and with each other in the same sort of way, sharing all of life's struggles and successes.

Which brings us back to the first verses of today's passage: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone." One way in which we can be with each other is to pray for each other; to pray for an inclusive, all of the world, each other. That term 'everyone' is hard, very hard.

-Pray for the driver that just cut you off that they might arrive safely.

-Pray for the person who seems to be a constant irritation in your life that God might use them as instrument of growth for you.

-Feeling critical of others? Thank God for the objects of your criticism, and ask God to make them a blessing wherever they go.

-Feeling unforgiving toward others?

Perhaps this is the most difficult of all of these suggestions. Many of us have been hurt, terribly hurt, by others. Perhaps we or a loved one have been the victim of a horrific crime or some terrorist action. It is extremely human to hold onto that hurt, to refuse to forgive. Yet we are called upon to pray for all people. Just as the prayer that we will soon recite together states: And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

An early Christian leader, John Chrysostom wrote: No one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays.

When things just do not seem to be going right in your life, read Psalm 113; then read Psalm 113 again: Praise the Lord! All day long, praise the Lord! For each breath, each day; for our faith give thanksgiving to the Lord our God who has loved us so much to send Jesus as mediator and savior.

The final verse of the Psalm about a barren woman seems strange to us today. At the time of the Psalms a barren woman was considered to be a disgrace, a failure, an outcast from the godly people around her. Nothing in our faith today puts such negative connotations upon being without children. But this verse does, once again, underscore that God cares about, and we are to pray for, everyone; all people however we might view them. For all people have been created in the image of God; God loves all people. Praise God!

Let us praise the Lord!

Hallelujah. Amen.