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In January of this year, there was a Velveeta shortage.

This was due to two factors. First of all, there was a recall on a half a million cases of Velveeta because the packaging failed to disclose soy as an ingredient. Secondly, the manufacturers failed to predict the extra-high demand Americans would make for Velveeta in preparation for the Super Bowl. For these two reasons, there was a Velveeta shortage, nicknamed by some to be the “Cheesepocalypse.”

This is inaccurate, because, as we all know, Velveeta isn't cheese at all. It's a processed cheese product. Now, I need to clarify two things before I make the connection between Velveeta and Jesus. First of all, I am not endorsing any brand-names nor am I bashing Velveeta, since my own refrigerator is never without it. Secondly, to badmouth Velveeta would be foolish, since it is the star ingredient for my soon-to-be husband's famous mac and cheese.

But even with these disclaimers and clarifications, we simply can't pretend that Velveeta is cheese when it's not real cheese. So, then, what is it? It is a processed cheese-like food that was invented in 1918 in New York and was eventually shipped to WWII soldiers overseas because it didn't need refrigeration. The signature boxes were then made of wood. Soldiers relied on it during war years as a main source of fat and trace calcium.

While Velveeta was a major part of war-time diets for soldiers serving overseas, nobody would make the claim that it is a healthy choice to regularly consume large quantities of the stuff. Regular and large consumption of Velveeta was ok for the short-term, under duress and necessity, yes. But not all day, every day, forever.

There is a time to feed on the fake stuff. But it will not nourish and it cannot sustain, because it is not real.

There is a time for Velveeta. And then there is a time for the real stuff, like Parmigiano Reggiano. This is real cheese made from raw cow's milk in the mountains of Italy. The method that goes into making this cheese goes back hundreds of years. Under Italian law, only cheese made in 5 provinces can carry this name. It's unprocessed and authentic, but it's worth the money. It's a rare and special treat. You could live on the stuff; indeed, most Italians do.

There is a time for the fake stuff...there is a time for the occasional queso dips and chips at the Super Bowl party. But then there is a time for the real stuff, for the stuff that feeds that soul and nourishes the body, the real stuff made from real milk from real cows.

This is a sermon about choices, a rare topic for a Lutheran pastor. We don't often speak about choices, because our theology clearly points to God's grace as a free gift, poured out on all people. We claim that we don't choose Jesus, he chooses us, as the evangelist John would concur. But there are those times in life when we have to make a choice, between Velveeta and Parmigiano Reggiano, between the fake stuff and the real stuff, between what's not good for us and what's good for us.

And this is what the prophet Isaiah is talking about.

He's talking to a bunch of exiles, people who have been kicked out of their homeland for generations. He's calling them back home. And they are faced with a choice. They can stay put, living as exiles in a foreign land, or they can come home. Either way, they are God's people. But Isaiah is calling them to participate in the good. Come home, he says to them. Come home and eat and drink and rest and rejoice. The choice is yours, and either way, God still loves you...but choose the good...choose to participate. Choose to come home, O people of God.

This invitation is for us, as well. We face this decision every day. We can participate in the goodness of God's creation, or we can not participate. We can build up, or we can tear down. We can rejoice, or we can judge. We can sustain or we can harm. We can love or we can hate. Either way, Jesus died for you. Either way, Jesus will forgive you and will love you. But he invites us into participation in the good life. Choose the good, Jesus invites us. Come into my light and my warmth. Come and let me

give you good drink and good food, food that is real and will nourish you and make you strong. Come into my home, which is not an imitation play house, but rather a real and abiding home, and don't just stay for a little while, but stay forever. Choose the good, Isaiah encourages us, so that you can fully know and experience the real goodness of God.