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New Monastic Notes



Nijkleaster



Food

How do we approach the issue of food at Westerhûs monastery? How do we make our choices, what do we eat and what do we avoid? First of all, some words of Jesus come to mind. In a discussion about dietary laws and table manners in Mark chapter 7 Jezus declared all foods clean: 'Nothing that enters people from the outside makes them unclean, but rather what comes out of the person. For it is from the heart that unclean thoughts and actions come.' Jesus does not want to talk about unclean food, but about unclean behavior. He doesn't want to address the outside, but the inside of our lives.

The conversation about food in today's society seems completely different from that of Jesus' time. Because today, there is indeed unclean food and it can also make us people unclean. This has less to do with the food itself and more with the way it has been produced. The use of pesticides makes food unclean. The knowledge that PFAS is everywhere in the air, in the water and the soil seriously concerns us and makes us uncertain about the food from our own vegetable garden and the eggs from our own chickens. But food can also become 'unclean', impure for other reasons. This has to do with how the earth is treated, how the earth is cultivated. It has to do with how animals are being treated. It has to do with how people are treated, how they are being cared for on the land and in the factories. When there is no proper and righteous care for the earth, the animals and people while producing food, then the food is 'contaminated', impure.

That is why we at Nijkleaster have come up with this three-pronged approach when it comes to food: organic, local, and fairtrade. Each time when we don't succeed to act according to our own standard, we still try to take a next step in this direction. This brings us closer to Jesus' position, namely that food is about purity of heart. What we eat has everything to do with purity and that's why we try to be conscious and pure in behavior. In the past, people used to say, 'Show me your bookshelf and I'll tell you who you are.' We translate that into today's terms as, 'Show me the shelves in your refrigerator and I'll tell you who you are.'

rev. Hinne Wagenaar