

Three Words of Truth

“Take and Eat. Take and Drink.”

- I. Jesus eagerly desires our presence
- II. Jesus graciously gives us his presents

*(Matthew 26:26-28) While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." {27} Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. {28} This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

Every year, my brothers and I, along with our families, gather in Baxter, Minnesota, where my mom lives, for a little family get-together. Even though we spend our days doing all kinds of things: fishing, playing tennis and volleyball, and fishing, and swimming and seining minnows, and did I say, fishing, no matter how many different things we're doing throughout the day, there's one thing we all come together for at the end of the day. We all gather for our evening meal. For me, it's one of my favorite parts of vacation. It's a time when we can really connect with each other. It's a time to find out what's going on in the life of the nieces and nephews, the brothers and sisters in law. (Because if there's one thing that Raaschs don't do while they're fishing, it's talk. It's like “We're fishing here. Got to concentrate. No talking.”) But when we're gathered around the dinner table, then it's time to laugh together and cry together, share each other's burdens and yes, pray for each other. Every night one of the brothers offers a prayer on behalf of the whole family.

Do you see why that evening meal is one of my favorite parts of vacation? Maybe you've had similar experiences with family meals that you've been a part of. There's just something special about sharing a meal, and the fellowship that goes with it, in the company of your family members.

Well, that, my friends, is what Jesus is inviting us, his family to share in today. It's not a potluck, with each one of us bringing our own dish to pass. No, this is a meal that Jesus has prepared. He's the one doing the serving. Jesus is the one who extends us his invitation—with three simple words of truth,

“Take and eat.” and “Take and drink.”

Today we turn our attention to the final meal that Jesus celebrated with his spiritual family, his disciples. And as we look at the events of that first Maundy Thursday, we'll uncover 2 key truths:

- I. Jesus eagerly desires our presence.
- II. Jesus graciously gives us his presents.

First, Jesus eagerly desires our presence. Did you hear what Jesus said to his disciples in our Gospel lesson a few moments ago? Jesus tells them, “*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*” (Luke 22:15). I don't know about you, but there is a part of me that thinks, “Jesus, are you sure you want to eat and drink with these disciples, the ones who have been bickering about which one would be the greatest, and who would be the one to sit at your right hand and your left hand, Jesus?” (Do you think they were still pushing and shoving to get the choice seats next to Jesus that night too?) And Jesus, aren't these the disciples that you

know are either going to betray you or deny your, or abandon you altogether—all in the next 24 hours? Jesus, are you sure that these are the guys you want to have your last supper with?

Jesus' answer is "Yes, it is." But, really, that shouldn't surprise us, should it? Isn't that the kind of thing that Jesus did throughout his earthly ministry? When Jesus entered the city of Jericho just a few days before this, whose house did he insist on staying at? Who did he want to have a meal with? He chose someone who had a terrible reputation, namely, Zacchaeus, the tax collector. In fact, that's what the Jewish officials found so offensive about Jesus? Luke tells us in Luke 15:2 *The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

That was like the brand that Jesus' enemies labeled him with. "*He eats with sinners!*" The religious people of Jesus' day saw that as a bad thing. The question is, "How about you?" How do you feel that Jesus eats with sinners? How do you feel that Jesus eagerly desired to eat the Passover with his sin-stained disciples? If you're like me, you realize that's not a bad thing. It's a wonderful thing. It means that Jesus might invite us to eat with him as well—which is exactly what he does with the words, "*Take and eat. Take and drink.*"

But before we come to the Lord's table, Jesus tells us that there is one thing we need to do in preparation for the meal he offers us. Just like your mom used to tell you, "You need to wash your hands before you come to the dinner table." Or "Take off that ball cap before you sit down to eat." So Jesus gives us some pre-meal instructions. Actually, Jesus speaks through the Apostle Paul who writes in 1st Corinthians 11:28, *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

What does that mean? No, it doesn't mean look in the mirror to make sure that your hair is combed and your tie is straight. It's not an invitation to look at your hair. It's an invitation to look at your heart. And you'll see that not by looking at the mirror in the bathroom, but rather by looking at the mirror in God's holy law. Isn't that right? The first table of the law says, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37).*" I don't know about you, but I look at that passage and I don't like what I see...in me. I see how often I love myself more than I love God. I see myself focusing not on God's will for my life, but on my will for my life.

Or I look at the second table of the law, and it says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself,*" and I ask myself, "Do I really love that other person as much as I love myself? Am I as eager to see them succeed in life as I am to see me succeed in life? Do I want them in heaven as much as I want me in Heaven?"

The more I examine my heart in the mirror of God's law, the uglier I look, the more unworthy I feel. I'm thinking, "I can't come to the Lord's table. I don't deserve a spot at the communion rail. This holy meal—it's really not for a rotten sinner like me.

You realize that, to a certain extent, that kind of thinking is not wrong. The fact is, I don't deserve a spot at the table. I've not earned an invitation to the holy meal. (In fact, if I choose to cling to my sin, I don't have an invitation to this meal. My impenitence will separate me from the blessings that the holy supper offers.) But if you and I know our sins, if we feel the burden of failing to live up to God's expectations, if we know how many times we've stepped into the traps that Satan has set for us—incredibly, it is exactly to you and me that Jesus says, "*I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you.*" Isn't that amazing? That a holy God wants you and me to join him for supper!

Tell me, have you ever been invited to a really fancy dinner were there was a table with all the names of the people who were invited to the event? And you look over the name tags and

you say, look, Dr. So-and-so is here. And, isn't that person that CEO of that big company? Whoa, the mayor I was invited to this? Wait, isn't she that famous actress? Wow, this is quite the guest list!

My friends, you realize that this meal also has a guest list, specifically prepared by the host of this meal. But the names on Jesus' guest list are maybe not the people you might expect to be invited to a holy supper. No, who are the people that Jesus has invited to this supper? Well, let me check the list. There's the mom who lashed out in anger at her child last night. The dad who just realized that he hasn't had a quality conversation with his son for weeks. The husband who knows he hurt his wife with the things he said and didn't say. The wife who caught herself dreaming about being with a man who's not her husband. The daughter who's made a habit of lying to her parents. The son who wants to quit using porn but can't seem to stop. The woman who doesn't want to worry, but still does. The teacher who feels like she's a failure. The pastor who doesn't practice what he preaches.

My friends, can you believe this is the guest list for Jesus' holy supper? If you can, in fact, if you can see yourself on that list, then know that your Savior, the Friend of Sinners, eagerly desires to eat this meal with you. Hear the invitation that Jesus extends to you with those three beautiful words of truth. *"Take and Eat. Take and drink."*

And yet, I have to say, that as remarkable as it is that Jesus invites sinners like us to come to this meal, even more remarkable is what he gives us in this meal. For you see, not only is it true that

I. Jesus eagerly desires our presence.

II He also graciously gives us his presents.

That's "presents", as in, gifts. We're talking about the undeserved gifts that Jesus gives us in the Lord's Supper. The first and most important present that Jesus gives us is...the forgiveness of sins. What did Jesus say to his disciples on that first Maundy Thursday? *"This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28).* By his death on the cross, Jesus won forgiveness for a world full of sinners. Would that qualify as pouring out his blood for "many"? Absolutely! A world full of sinners is "many" people. But then God takes that gift of forgiveness won on the cross for all and he distributes it in various ways. Just as a loving spouse finds different ways to say, "I love you," so also, Jesus finds different ways to say "I forgive you." Maybe it's through the words of absolution, where Jesus speaks through one of his called servants, saying "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Or maybe Jesus distributes his forgiveness through the washing of holy baptism, as the prophet Ananias once told Saul of Tarsus, *"Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away."* (Acts 22 verse 16). Or maybe he gives it through the Holy Supper, where in, with, and under the bread and wine, Jesus offers you his body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. With this holy supper, Jesus feeds all our senses—our seeing, our hearing, our touching, even tasting. How did the psalmist put it? *Taste and see that the Lord is good. (Psalm 34:8).*

And yet, it's not just forgiveness that the Lord gives us in the holy supper. As Martin Luther once said, *"Where there is forgiveness, there is also life and salvation."* You might say that these are God's gifts for your past, your present, and your future. The blood that Jesus spilled for you means that he is not holding your past against you. In the present, he's giving you life as a child of God. And in the future, he'll save you from the presence of sin and death forever. Forgiveness of sins equals life and salvation. Those are the gracious presents Jesus gives you in his holy supper.

But there's one more present that Jesus gives you and me through this sacred meal. And that is, a connection to each other. Call it, a bond of fellowship. Yes, call it "close communion". The bottom line is, when we come to this rail, we all come from our different walks of life. We all carry different kinds of baggage with us. We all bear different burdens. Some of us are emotionally hurting, some of us are physically hurting. Some are joyful, some are sad. Some are young, some are old. Some are rich. Some are poor. But when we kneel at the rail, we are all equal. In the bread and wine, we all receive Jesus' body and blood. And through this Sacrament, Jesus not only connects us to himself, he connects us to each other. And here's the really remarkable thing. He not only connects us to each other here at Mount Olive. He connects us to the whole Christian Church on earth. He connects us to the Communion of Saints.

In fact, did you know that's why we have a curved communion rail? Did you ever notice that our rail forms a part of a much larger invisible circle? Do you know what that circle represents? It represents the whole Christian Church both here on earth and in heaven. Here's the part that we can see. But when we kneel at this rail, we're united with a whole bunch of people we can't see. Christians from around the world. Believers who have gone before us into heaven. Saints who are now gathered around the throne of God. Yes, this rail is a vivid reminder that we are part of a much bigger body in heaven and on Earth, all gathered around the Altar of the Lamb, whose blood purifies us from every sin.

You talk about the ultimate family meal, here it is! Do I love the meal that I share with my family when I'm on vacation? You bet I do. But I have to say, it can't compare to this meal that Jesus offers to you and me as members of his family. And to think that this meal is just a taste of an even greater feast that Jesus has already prepared for us in heaven? Oh what a gracious God we have! A God who comes to us tonight and says, "Sinner, Take and eat. Take and Drink." Here is good food...for your soul! Amen.