

April 11, 2017



“What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?”

“Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins...in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words.”

When I come to the Lord’s Table at Holy Communion, I experience many things. Often I experience hesitation. I’m not prepared. I haven’t done enough to get ready. It’s all going to fast. I’m too distracted. So I pray. I pray as I have for years before coming to the Lord’s Table. “Good and gracious God,” I pray, “by the power of Your Holy Spirit, create in me the faith which alone makes me worthy to participate in this Holy Supper. Amen.”

Then I feel an invitation. I’m grateful that we have a formal invitation in our worship liturgy. It’s usually something like, “The feast is ready. Come and receive the gift.” I am so glad that the invitation is open to all who are present. It is the Lord’s Table, after all, not ours. It is not up to me as the pastor to discern the individual worthiness of those who will participate. Instead, I trust the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of those who will come to the table.

In fact, my role as the pastor and preacher at worship is to make that invitation as winsome and attractive and compelling as possible. In the Sacrament, Luther reminds us, we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. One of my challenges week in and week out, is to make that good news so inviting, so compelling, that worshipers will want to sprint toward the table to receive the gifts. I’m not sure I’ve ever preached a message that has risen to that standard. But I keep trying. And it would be wonderful sight!

Then I feel the community. When we call the Sacrament of the Altar “Holy Communion,” we are reminded of this element of the Sacrament. We gather as the Body of Christ--the Church--to receive the body and blood of Christ. In that communion, we are united with Christians around the world who gather at the one table that belongs to Jesus. Jesus promises to be present at each and all of those tables. So it is the presence of Jesus that makes all the tables into one table.

In that communion, we are united with the Communion of Saints, not only in all places but in all times as well. I love those moments when I feel the presence of family members and friends at the table with me--my dad, my grandmother, Sunday School teachers, former students--dear sisters and brothers in Christ who have entered the new life ahead of us. The Sacrament of the Altar is the family meal for the people of God. I find it deeply moving to know that all of God’s family gathers at that table every time.

And then I feel sent. God’ gifts always come with a vocation, a calling. When we eat and drink we are especially called to remember those who struggle to find adequate food and water, shelter and safety on a daily basis. We who are so well fed have a calling to be God’s means of feeding others.

Let’s pray. Dear God, give me the power of your Holy Spirit that creates in me the faith to come to the table hungry, to receive Your gifts with joy, and to share Your gifts with others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Consider a gift the the World Hunger relief efforts of the ELCA. Just mark your gift “World Hunger,” and it will go to those in need.

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