

Thursday, April 18, 2019 – Maundy Thursday
“Maundy Thursday in Seven Words: “Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul”

Matthew 26: 26-28

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Dialogical Structure

Adapted from CSL “The Gospel in Seven Words”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

“Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul.” If I had to summarize Maundy Thursday with seven words, that’s what I’d say. “Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul.” And make no mistake. My soul—and I have the feeling your soul, too—is hungry.

Hunger is a universal experience, right? We all understand the need to feed our bodies. Every day, throughout the day, our bodies work hard. They labor, constantly, simply to keep us alive and moving. And because of that work, our bodies constantly need rejuvenation. They constantly need refueling. Back in high school biology we learned all about digestion and metabolism and caloric consumption. But those concepts only named sensations that all of us experience. Even the youngest baby knows the pain of a stomach that needs to be filled. The simple fact is that we must eat to stay alive. Our bodies must receive regular and continual nourishment. So do our souls.

The human soul—I’m talking about that part of us that isn’t located in a specific organ, but that no one denies is a real and central component of who we are—also needs nourishment. Like our bodies, our souls also grow weary. Like our bodies, our souls tire out and wear down. Stress, and strain, and struggles we face in a sin-fallen world take their toll. As a result, we experience a different kind of hunger. We experience an emptiness in our souls that needs to be filled.

This is not a uniquely Christian idea. Just about everyone seems to understand this basic human need. Take Adele Ryan McDowell, for example. Adele Ryan McDowell is a psychotherapist who teaches meditation and transformational healing. With a PhD in psychology, she writes books and speaks at conferences across the country. And, significantly for our purposes tonight, it’s important to note that she’s not a Christian. In 2009 she wrote an article called “50 Ways to Feed Your Soul.” In it she emphasized the need to replenish our souls so that we might live meaningful and fulfilling lives. The article offers fifty suggestions for how to do this. I’ll share a few with you:

1. *Have a pillow fight.* 2. *Take a walk in the forest.* 4. *Smell a rose.* 5. *Smell a baby.* 19. *Make snow angels.* 20. *Swim with the dolphins.* 32. *Sing in the shower.* 44. *Finger paint.* 49. *Play with a puppy.*

Do these things, she says, and you will feed your hungry soul.

Now don't get me wrong. A pillow fight can be fun. I love walking in the woods; and babies smell great—except when they smell really, really bad. But I read these suggestions for nourishing my soul and they seem so... hollow. So barren. They seem so inadequate for the real struggles, the real difficulties we face in life. In the end, playing with a puppy isn't going to do anything to help us face the serious and deeply troubling problems that wear us down.

McDowell has a few other ideas, however. Some of them, at first glance, appear more substantive. 38. *Talk with the angels.* (Although she doesn't say anything about how to do this or what to say to them.) 7. *Surrender to love.* (Although she doesn't tell us what love looks like, or how to surrender to it.) 30. *Forgive yourself—for everything.* Now this one is worth stopping to consider. Forgive yourself, she says. And in saying so she recognizes that we need to be forgiven.

Our souls are weary for a variety of reasons. They are weary because of the way others have treated us. They are weary because of the relentless pace, the rat race we've made of life. They are weary because of dreams left unmet, and because we've failed to achieve our lofty aspirations. Often times, due to no direct fault of our own, life beats down our souls and wears us out.

Of course, it's not just the external forces. Our souls are also wearied by that which comes from within. Discontent. Anger. Fear. Guilt. Our own brokenness continually lets us down. Our own limitations repeatedly remind us of our failings. Ultimately, the source of our weariness comes down to one thing, and one thing alone. Our own sinful condition. Do you remember Psalm 32? Psalm 32 describes one who, rather than confessing his sin, languishes in shame and guilt. "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer" (Psalm 32: 3–4). His soul was parched. It was desperately in need of nourishment.

McDowell was right about one thing. Our souls need to be fed with forgiveness. But her suggestion about *where* we find forgiveness is one of the greatest and most prevalent lies today. Forgive yourself, she says. But that's not possible! The simple fact is that forgiveness can't be found from within because our sin is not, at its foundation, against ourselves. Our sin is, first and foremost, against God. And, therefore, only *God* can forgive.

Tonight—on the night Jesus was betrayed—we recall a very special meal. It was a meal God himself had arranged. A meal God himself had commanded Moses and the people of Israel to eat as a remembrance of how he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. For generations, the people of God had been eating and drinking this meal and thanking God for what he had done to save them. But on this particular night—the night Jesus was betrayed—our Lord transformed this very special meal that recalls God's deliverance into a meal that, quite literally, feeds our souls.

That's what Martin Luther called it. In his Large Catechism, as he was trying to describe what God is doing in the Lord's Supper, he calls this bite of bread and this sip of wine "food for the soul" (LC, V.23). This "food for the soul" is a different kind of meal. We eat and drink this meal with our mouths. We chew and swallow and digest the bread and wine. But in this meal God promises more than physical nourishment. Listen again to how Matthew described it: "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

"Food for the soul." Bread and wine, body and blood—poured out for many. Poured out for you. With this meal God provides for us the very thing for which our souls are longing. He offers us his forgiveness, his life, his salvation. He gives us his very self to sustain and nourish us for our struggle in this tiresome and trying existence.

Throughout this season of Lent, we've been thinking about how we could summarize the good news of Jesus. We've been trying to describe the gospel using only seven words. Tonight, we'll put it like this:

On this Maundy Thursday...

on this night on which Jesus was betrayed...

on this night when he ate and drank with his disciples...

on this night that took him to the hall of the High Priest and the palace of Pontius Pilate
and ultimately to the hill outside Jerusalem...

on this night when Jesus gave himself for us to eat and drink,

Jesus comes, and he gives us his body and his blood in bread and wine,

Jesus comes, and he presents himself among us and for us and in us,

Jesus comes, to our weary souls, our tired souls, our hungry souls, and he sustains us and
nourishes us and strengthens us for our struggle through this valley of tears.

Sisters and brothers, *that's* the gospel. That's the good news on this Maundy Thursday, and
every time we gather around his table.

"Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul."

In Jesus's name. Amen.