

**“Jesus Comes to Feed My Hungry Soul” | Matthew 26:26-28 | Maundy Thursday
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“Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul.”

If I had to summarize Maundy Thursday in seven words, that’s what I would say.

Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul.

And make no mistake. My soul...and I have a feeling your soul, too...is hungry.

Hunger is a universal experience, isn’t it? We all understand that we need to feed our bodies. Each and every day our bodies work hard...laboring constantly simply to keep us alive and moving. And because of that work our bodies need constant rejuvenation. They constantly need refueling. Back in high school you probably learned all about digestion and metabolism and caloric consumption. But those concepts only gave names to what we all experience. Every one of us knows, and even the smallest child knows, the pain of a stomach that needs to be filled.

The simple fact is that we must eat to stay alive. Our bodies need regular and continual nourishment.

The human soul - I’m talking about that part of us that isn’t located in a specific organ of the body - but is nevertheless a real and central component of who we are - it too needs nourishment. Just like our bodies, our souls grow weary. Just like our bodies, our souls tire out and wear down.

Stress, strain, the struggles we face in this sinful and broken world. They all take their toll. As a result, we experience a different kind of hunger. We experience an emptiness not in our stomach but in our soul. A different kind of hunger but a hunger that is very real. A hunger that desperately needs to be filled.

This idea of refueling our souls is not, however, a uniquely Christian idea. Just about everyone understands this basic human need to feed our hungry souls. One psychotherapist, Adele Ryan McDowell, for example, teaches meditation and transformational healing. She writes books and speaks at conferences. She’s not a Christian but, in 2009 she wrote an article called “50 Ways to Feed Your Soul.”

In this article she emphasized the need to replenish our souls so that we might live meaningful and fulfilling lives. The article offers 50 suggestions but I’ll share just a few with you tonight.

1. Have a pillow fight
2. Take a walk in the forest
3. Smell a rose
4. Make a snow angel
5. Finger paint
6. Play with a puppy

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

Now don't get me wrong, I enjoy a good pillow fight...walking in the woods is one of mine and Jen's great stress-relievers...and we also enjoy playing with our dog, Olivia. But, perhaps you got the same feeling I did as I read through these suggestions to nourish my hungry soul. They are all fine things to do but, when it comes to nourishing our souls, they all seem so...hollow. So barren. They all seem so inadequate to actually address the real struggles and difficulties that we all face in life. In the end, finger painting, though fun, isn't going to do anything to help us face the deep troubles that wear us down every day of our lives.

McDowell had a few other ideas, though. Some of them appear a little more substantive.

Talk with the angels...although she doesn't say anything about how to do this or what to say to them

Surrender to live...but she doesn't tell us what love looks like or how to go about surrendering to it.

Forgive yourself. This one is interesting. Now, she doesn't go into detail about *how* we ought to go about doing this but by offering this up as a suggestion, she does recognize that we, each one of us, has a need to be forgiven.

Our souls are weary and hungry for variety of reasons. They are weary because of the ways in which we have been treated by others...they are weary because of the breakneck pace of life...they are weary because of the lofty aspirations we have failed to achieve.

Our souls are hungry because of the discontent, the anger, the fear, the guilt that we all harbor. Our souls are hungry because our own brokenness continually lets us down.

Ultimately, our souls are hungry because of our sinful condition. Psalm 32 describes this well. The psalmist writes, "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”. Notice how his silence dried up his soul. That is, rather than confessing his sins, the psalmist languished in sin and guilt. And it ate him up. He was desperate for some nourishment that would feed this weary soul racked with guilt and shame.

McDowell was right about one thing. Our souls desperately need to be fed with forgiveness. But her suggestion about *where* to find that forgiveness is one of the greatest, yet most common lies, today. Her suggestion? Forgive *yourself*.

But that’s simply not possible! The simple fact is that forgiveness cannot be found within ourselves because our sin is not, at its root, against ourselves. Our sin is against God. We have failed to obey *His* commands. We have failed to stop and listen to his Word. We have made our own success and aspirations into an idol which we worship every day.

Our sin is against God...and therefore only God can forgive.

On this night, this night when 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 God had delivered them from slavery and out of Egypt. And for *generations* God’s people had celebrated this feast of the Passover, thanking God for what he had done to save them.

But on this particular night, the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus transformed this very special meal that recalls God’s deliverance into a meal that quite literally *feeds our hungry 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 with our mouths...we chew and swallow and digest. But in this meal God promises more than physical nourishment. Listen again to how Matthew describes 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*.

In this simple meal, God provides for us the very thing for which our souls are longing. He offers us his forgiveness, his life, and his salvation. He gives us his very self to strengthen and preserve us, as our post-communion blessing goes, for our struggle through this tiresome and trying existence.

That's the gospel on this Maundy Thursday and every single time we gather together at the communion table. That on this Maundy Thursday...

On this night when Jesus was betrayed...

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 to us to eat and to 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, tired, and hungry souls to sustain us and nourish us and strengthen us for our journey through this valley of tears.

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Throughout this season of Lent, we've been thinking about how we could summarize the gospel using only seven words. Tonight, on this Maundy Thursday, we'll put it like this.

"Jesus comes to feed my hungry soul." Amen.