

Luke 22.14-20
“A Nourishing Meal”
4/13/17 - Maundy Thursday
LCVH

I have a bit of a sweet tooth. Any fellow sweet toothers here? I’ve come to believe that everyone in the south has a sweet tooth. So I *LOVE* ice cream and cheesecake; Dr. Pepper and Mountain Dew; Reese’s and Hershey’s cookies and cream; caramel and vanilla lattes. I love it all. And through most of my life I’ve pretty much been able to eat whatever sweets I want, whenever I want, with really no negative consequences. But, recently, this strange this has started happening. I’ve noticed this cushiony layer forming around my torso that’s never been there before. The fast metabolism I was blessed with when I was ten, fifteen, and twenty is apparently slowing down now that I’m [cough] thirty. It turns out that all those sweets I love really are junk food and really aren’t all that great for my health. I guess junk food shouldn’t be a significant portion of my diet. Who knew? So this Lent I started to cut back the sweets by giving up candy and pop. And for over five weeks now I’ve just felt ... *miserable*. I hate it. I’ve also been counting calories and intentionally eating healthier food. It’s been kinda hard and not really all that fun, but I know I need to do these things to feel better, stay active, and keep my body healthy.

Well let’s set my eating habits aside. Tatum, Melora, L.J., Maisie, Lucas, Henry, Carter, Ashley, and David, tonight’s a big night for you. You’ve been preparing for your first communion. You’ve shared your banners with us and professed before the church that you believe Jesus gives his true body and blood in the Lord’s Supper for forgiveness of sins. And in a few moments you will eat and drink the bread and wine of this special meal for the first time. I’m excited for you! Your families and the rest of the church are excited for you too. This is a huge step in your life as a Christian; a big milestone in your walk with Jesus. I know your first

communion is going to be a blessing for each of you, and I sincerely pray that you will continue to receive the blessings of communion for the rest of your lives.

Communion is God's gift to you. But it's kind of a strange gift, isn't it? Have you ever wondered why in the world Jesus instituted this strange meal for us? If you were to ask your friends what they were doing this weekend, and they told you that they're going to eat a human body and then drink its blood, you'd probably respond with "Uh huh" while slowly stepping backwards and then making a break for it. That's just weird! And communion is honestly kind of weird. Jesus took ordinary bread and wine and declared them to be his body and blood. Then he told his disciples to eat and drink it! I wonder how weirded out the disciples were that night. And Jesus has commanded all Christians to eat and drink this strange meal. Unfortunately, many of our Christian friends try to get around the weirdness of communion by saying the bread and wine only represent Jesus' body and blood so that they can remember all that he has done for them. But that's not what Jesus said. He said "this *is* my body" and "this *is* my blood." Jesus wants us to remember him and all that he has done for us by eating bread and drinking wine that are truly his body and blood. As Lutherans we let the weirdness stand. We admit we don't understand everything about communion, but by faith we trust Jesus and believe what he said.

Yet Jesus doesn't want us to take communion *only* for the sake of remembering him. We could just as easily remember him without eating or drinking anything. When we receive communion, God is doing something for us and in us. By eating and drinking, God nourishes and strengthens our faith so our faith can continue to grow and remain healthy. Jesus wants us to take communion because he wants to give us the spiritual nourishment our faith and life need. He wants our faith and life in him to stay healthy. It's like in health class where we learned what nourishment our bodies need to stay physically healthy. Our bodies need the various nutrients

that fruits and vegetables, breads, proteins, and dairy provide. Without them our bodies can wither and weaken and become susceptible to getting sick. Conversely, there are plenty of things that give our body bad “nourishment.” Sweets and junk food cause tooth decay, clog arteries, and over time can produce various diseases. Too much junk food destroys our bodies.

For our physical lives to be healthy, we need to eat certain nutrients while avoiding others. The same is true for our spiritual lives. We need to receive healthy spiritual nourishment while avoiding spiritual junk food. But unfortunately, we are easily and constantly influenced by spiritual junk food. And spiritual junk food comes in all sorts of flavors. It might be friends at school who pressure you to do wrong things like cheating on homework or talking trash about people behind their backs. It might be movies or TV shows that promote sex outside of marriage. Or viewing other peoples’ Instagram and becoming jealous of their lives that seem so much better than yours. Fighting with family members, disrespecting teachers or bosses, doubting God’s love for you when you’re going through difficulties, it’s all spiritual junk food. It’s all poisonous to your spiritual life in God. It leads you away from Jesus and the healthy faith and life he wants you to have. What’s more, avoiding healthy spiritual nourishment is harmful to you as well. Never speaking with God in prayer, avoiding the fellowship of other Christians, stagnating in your study of God’s Word, or not going to church all result in a weakened spiritual life. Going after spiritual junk food and avoiding healthy spiritual nourishment are both toxic for your everyday life and your faith in Jesus. They lead to spiritual death.

We clearly need spiritual nourishment. So what is it that Jesus gives you in communion that helps you stay spiritually healthy? What nourishment do you receive by eating and drinking Jesus’ body and blood? Strangely enough, Jesus gives you his death. The body and blood that you will eat and drink in a few moments is the same body and blood that was crucified on the

cross two thousand years ago. It's the same body and blood that died for your sins so that you may be forgiven. By receiving Jesus' death through his body and blood, you receive the forgiveness of *all* your sins. Jesus wipes away your every sin, every failure to obey God's commands, every time you've disobeyed those in authority over you, every time you've lied, and every impure thought you've ever had. It's all forgiven. Jesus' body and blood are the spiritual medicines you need to destroy the toxic spiritual junk food in your life.

What's more, the body and blood that you eat and drink are the same body and blood that rose from the dead. Therefore, Jesus *also* gives you his resurrected life whenever you eat and drink the simple bread and wine of communion. God first gave you a new life in your baptism, and now in the Lord's Supper Jesus continues to give you new life, new life shaped by *his* resurrected life. This new life that Jesus has and continues to give you acts like a spiritual multivitamin, a vitamin that strengthens and nourishes your faith that it might be healthy by growing ever closer to Christ. When your faith is strengthened and nourished, the Holy Spirit enables you to resist temptation, to refuse to ever doubt God's love for you, and to continually seek God in every area of your life. Jesus' body and blood are the spiritual nutrients you need to live out your new Christian life.

And one of the coolest things about communion is that in his body and blood Jesus gives you his death for the forgiveness of your sins and his life for the nourishment of your faith in common, everyday food and drink. As humans Jesus knows that we need to receive his blessings in a physical manner. So he doesn't just give you forgiveness and life and salvation in word only as abstract thoughts, but he gives them to you in a way that you can physically touch, see, smell, and taste. Jesus himself became a physical human being that people could see and hear and touch. And you get to experience Jesus in a similar way when you participate in the Lord's

Supper. Jesus is present at this altar, and he will give you *himself*.

If we're honest, unhealthy food is often more attractive than healthy food. A bowl of strawberry ice cream is more appealing than a bowl of kale or quinoa. That bowl of ice cream may taste good for a bit, but in the long run it won't keep you healthy, for only nutritious foods will give you a healthy body. For you fifth graders and everyone else here, know that throughout your life spiritual junk food will often appear more attractive than the spiritual nourishment that Jesus knows you need and freely gives you. Spiritual junk food only leads to a life apart from God and ultimately to eternal death. But spiritual nourishment, especially the forgiveness and new life you receive by eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood, leads you closer to God and ultimately to eternal life with Jesus. So come. Come to this table to receive the nourishment God has for you as you eat Jesus' true body and drink his true blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Come to this table to enjoy Jesus himself. Amen.