

TEXT: Matthew 26:26-28

THEME: TAKE AND EAT; TAKE AND DRINK

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

So here we are again, at the most significant, most sacred weekend in our worship life as Christians. Here we are again in spirit in the upper room, at the foot of the cross, and—wonder of wonders—staring into the empty tomb where Jesus of Nazareth is *not*. This weekend, again, is truly the high point of our worship life.

But I happen to know a little boy who views this time with a bit of sadness. Why? Because this means the end of our weekly Lenten suppers in the church fellowship hall. That may seem to be a trite observation. But is it? Think about what happens there in the fellowship hall each week. We gather as one big family in Christ. We talk over a meal. We share joys; we share concerns; we share sorrows and trials. We share encouragements and Bible passages and promises to pray for one another. We serve one another; we either bring food to share or perhaps some money to share so that this good thing—this comfortable meal, this fellowship—can keep going. There's a lot more happening during the church supper on Wednesday nights than just eating. Then again, that's the way it is at family meals, right?

But tonight we are the guests. We are the ones being served; everything is prepared. Tonight there is an even higher level of intimacy, a higher level of fellowship, and greater blessings than just a good meal with good friends. Tonight our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the friend of sinners, invites us each to come and feast with him. It is a banquet that, this side of heaven, is without compare.

The words of his invitation are familiar:

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

The two "three words of truth" here are familiar, and they tell us:

1. HERE JESUS EAGERLY DESIRES YOUR PRESENCE.
2. HERE JESUS GRACIOUSLY GIVES YOU HIS PRESENTS.

HERE JESUS EAGERLY DESIRES YOUR PRESENCE.

When I was a child, at my church we sang the "Create in Me" after every sermon. I was singing it before I could read. For some time, I misunderstood what I should have been singing. I always sang, "Cast me not away from thy presents." That made sense to me because I wanted all the presents Jesus had for me. As I grew older, I realized my mistake and definitely did not want to be cast away from being near my Savior.

Tonight Jesus asks us to come into his presence. I cannot understand it, why Jesus would say to me, “Take and eat. . . . Take and drink. . . .” But he has, and he still does. He desires for you to eat and drink with him and rejoices to see you here. Don’t doubt it! This is a meal for sinners, one and all, who believe in Jesus as their one and only Savior from sin, who believe that with the bread and the wine they receive the true body and blood of Jesus. As with any meal, the host writes and controls the guest list. Are you a sinner who knows all too well your sins and who hangs your head over them in true repentance and faith? You’re on the list. Come! The Lord himself has invited you.

And now I know I wasn’t so far off as a youngster singing about my Savior’s presents, his gifts. When I not only consider the marvelous truth that he wants *me* to come to this meal, I am equally astounded by what he *gives* me at this meal. HE EAGERLY DESIRES MY PRESENCE SO THAT HE CAN GRACIOUSLY GIVE ME HIS PRESENTS!

They are presents; they are gifts of grace without compare. That treasured book of ours, Luther’s catechism, says it so succinctly: **“forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation . . . For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”**

Here in this meal your Savior forgives you your sins. Just as a creative spouse finds various and different ways to say “I love you” besides just words, the same is true of our Savior. Yes, he says “I love you, I forgive you” on the pages of his Word, but he does here too, as well in the water of Baptism. Here we can taste; here we can see that the Lord is good. He touches other senses besides our ears and eyes. This bread and wine on your lips brings you your Savior’s true body and blood.

What’s more, at this meal Jesus also gives the gift of *unity*. We all come here from different walks of life. We are men; we are women; we are young; we are old. We are in different income brackets. We are from different ethnic backgrounds. We are healthy; we are sick. We are joyful; we are sad. But we come to this holy feast as equals. We kneel next to one another as a family in Christ. We all receive the same bread, the same wine. And through this meal God not only binds us to himself all the more closely, but he also binds us to one another. He does that so we can share this time of grace together in the bond of peace—working together, sharing joys and burdens, praying for and encouraging one another. In short, *loving one another deeply*—the very thing Jesus said would let the outside world know that we are truly his disciples.

All this! All this . . . How blessed we are to gather here tonight and be reminded of these things. Here is the culmination of all our Lenten dining. And even though our fellowship meals in the fellowship hall have been wonderful over the past few weeks, they pale in comparison to what will happen here tonight and what happens every time the friend of sinners says, **“Take and eat; take and drink.”** Amen.