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Worship Library

Title: A Foretaste of the Feast to Come

Category: Sacraments

In their reports of Jesus' earthly ministry, the evangelists frequently refer to food. More specifically, they speak of Jesus dining with or feeding others. How often don't we hear the religious leaders complaining that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners? And what of His miraculous feeding of the thousands?

In several of His parables, Jesus uses the image of a meal to depict the eternal fellowship that we will one day share with Him. In those parables, Jesus highlights the abundance of God's gifts and the joy of feasting in His presence forever.

It should come as no surprise that there is another meal of Jesus that combines all of these themes. It's the Last Supper, where He instituted the meal that we call, among other things, the Lord's Supper. And that meal is of tremendous significance to us, for here our Lord comes to spread before us the magnificent feast of His own body and blood.

In the Divine Service in the Synod's new hymnal supplement, a third prayer has been included after the distribution of the Sacrament. This prayer ties together the holy meal that we eat here on earth with the eternal feast that awaits us in heaven.

Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son's body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage that, on the Day of His coming, we may, together with all Your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now forever (Hymnal Supplement 98, p. 15).

How often do we think of the Lord's Supper as a "foretaste of the feast to come"? Instead of looking at our watch to see how long the distribution is taking, how much more beneficial it would be to contemplate how this meal permits us to see a glimpse of that heavenly reality. Let's consider a few of the parallels.

- In heaven we will be in the immediate presence of the triune God. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus is truly present, giving us His true body and blood under the bread and wine.
- In heaven Jesus will be our host for all eternity. In the Sacrament He is the Host who invites us to come to Him. What's more, He's also the cook and the butler--and even the food!
- In heaven Jesus will grant us eternal life. In the Lord's Supper our Lord grants us forgiveness. And as the Small Catechism explains so well, "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

In one of Jesus' parables, a guest is found who is not wearing the wedding garment. Immediately he is thrown out (Matt. 22:1-14). Would you believe that that incident presents us with a dress code for how we are to present ourselves at the Lord's Supper? It's not a prescription for the type of clothing to wear. Rather, we come to this holy meal as guests of the Bridegroom, clothed in His royal righteousness. Through faith we stand before Him, able to take part in the sumptuous feast and the wondrous gifts He lavishes on us.

In the post-communion prayer, we ask God to "keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage." The very gift that God gives us--faith--He also strengthens in this meal. In that strength, we go out into the world to serve wherever He has sent us.

The Lord's Supper is not an escape from this world, but a continuing source of comfort and strength that enables us to live in this world. Yet, this life is a pilgrimage. The Sacrament reminds us of that as we get our glimpse of heaven and our foretaste of the feast to come. We haven't reached our heavenly home yet, but in his meal we get a taste of that life to come. And with the psalmist, we joyfully proclaim, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

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