

Lent Wednesday 5 (4/5/2017)
Luther's Small Catechism
The Sacrament of the Altar
Matthew 26:26-29

1. What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

2. What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

The words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin" show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.

3. How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."¹

Luther elaborates:

[The Lord's Supper] is appropriately called food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. For in the first instance, we are born anew through baptism. However, our human flesh and blood, as I have said, have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint and at times even stumble. ...For times like these, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment.²

The hungriest I've ever felt was at the end of a long day's hike through the Rocky Mountains with my high school youth group. We were on the verge of breaking down as we made our final descent into a remote valley, the exhilaration of having reached the summit finally giving way to exhaustion. And collapsing in a

¹ *Luther's Small Catechism*, 500 Years of Reformation edition, 49-51.

² Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, 469.

sanctuary of evergreen trees, we wolfed down remarkably small portions of Backpacker's Pantry supper. Nevertheless, it was enough. I don't imagine that any of us could have gone on without that rest and that meal.

"[The Lord's Supper] is appropriately called food of the soul." If the life of faith is like a journey through the wilderness, then Holy Communion is like a meal to nourish us for each new leg. It's no simple bread and wine, of course, but bread and wine joined to Jesus' promise to give us life, and life abundant.³ We know that the Way of discipleship is fraught with difficulties – "hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world," to borrow Luther's words. Stress and hardship and loss threaten to break us down, yet Jesus meets us again and again with a sustaining ration – simple food shared among fellow travelers around a word of grace.

Jesus' life, given and poured out *for you*, dear church, is nothing less than "new strength and refreshment" for the next stretch of the trail, so that you may walk in hope no matter how strenuous the steps.

³ John 10:10.