

We bow our hearts in prayer: Dear Lord, as the Israelites in the wilderness longed for food until You fed them with manna, so may we hunger for Your Son, the Bread of Life sent down from heaven. As we long to come to Your table, feed us with Your forgiveness and nourish us to strengthen us for the trials and temptations ahead. Amen.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, ever singing Your praise! Blessed are those whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you would be shocked, and maybe even horrified, if you had to experience the tabernacle and temple worship of God's people in the OT.

Today we have nice clean church buildings with an orderly altar, font and pulpit, a designated place for the congregation to sit, ushers to bring your offerings forward, and so on. But the OT services in the temple were not exactly the same way.

It wasn't ushers that brought forward the sacrificial animals. It was you.

Having so many animals to be offered for sacrifice, the place is bound to be a little messy.

While cleanliness was certainly a top priority for God's people, anytime you have animals being sacrificed and blood being spilt and caught and thrown, there is going to be a lot of blood stains.

To those looking from the outside in on these services, it would appear that the temple was a house of death.

There you would be confronted with your sins, because something had to die right in front of you because of something you had done or not done.

You placed your hands on its head and confessed your sins so that it bore the burden of your guilt.

The throat was slit and the priest's garments were stained dark red as they got the bowls to catch the blood in order to splash it at the base of the altar.

So doesn't it seem kind of morbid when we hear the psalmist say,

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord?

Why, we might ask, would someone want to be there?

Why would God not only encourage them to be there, but even demand that they participate?

It seems odd to us to think of all this death as a good thing, as an experience

to which we would take our children singing psalms of praise with joy in our hearts.

But what looks from the outside as a house of death was really a house of life for God's people.

God established these sacrifices precisely so that those who participated in them in faith, would be redeemed, forgiven, and nourished through them.

Here the innocent animal would bear their guilt and be condemned to death for their sins,

while the truly guilty would be freed from God's wrath and punishment.

God drew them out of their regular lives to bring them to the altar where things were different. Those with whom they walked into the temple were not different from them.

Sure they may have had a different social or economic status,
but everyone walking through those doors needed forgiveness, redemption and nourishment,
even the priests.

And they all needed the same answer. They needed the blood of another from an innocent body.

God draws you out so that you can see your need, as well.

This was what He did in our Gospel text today.

It is true that Jesus did not tell the people to follow Him out in to the wilderness.

In fact, His intent was to allow Himself and His disciples to rest from their already strenuous day,
but when the people followed Him, He did not turn them away.

Nor did He dismiss them earlier so that they might go find themselves something to eat.

Going out into the wilderness with no food in order to listen to a rabbi might have looked like a death sentence to those on the outside,

but to Jesus, this looked like a golden opportunity to show them God's unmerited love.

He knew their real needs even before they did and He was making provision for it.

It's true that some came for less than noble reasons,
whether to test Jesus or find something against Him.

Others came for selfish reasons. They had medical issues and wanted only to be healed.

Sure, some came to be entertained by watching the miracles being performed.

And there were certainly those who came recognizing that He was God's Son

and wanted simply to be in His presence because He alone **had the Words of eternal life.** John 6:68

But regardless of why they came, Jesus' love and mercy was dispensed to all,

for He recognized the need of the crowd, that they would have fainted on the way home
if they did not have nourishment for their trip.

Jesus did not discriminate in dispensing His gifts.

All 5,000 men (+ woman and children) ate to their fill whether they believed in Him or not.

Those who trusted in Jesus were not disappointed. They had their hunger satisfied.

Those who came to be healed were not turned away, but healed and fed.

Even the doubters and skeptics left with full stomachs, unless they let the food pass them by.

Just as in the OT temple worship and the wilderness trip, Jesus would draw you out of your world
and into His world where there is nothing around you to believe you can help yourself.

To the outsider looking in, the Divine Service may look like a house of death.

After all, we have a figure of a crucified man hanging front and center in this place of worship.

As we gather, we speak about the death and punishment that we deserve because of our sins,

both those that we have committed or omitted, but even of our original, inherited sin
that we were conceived in and that we had no control over.

We speak and preach about the inability of our works, even our good works to appease God
or to make Him more kindly disposed toward us.

We pray prayers like our Collect for the Day: *Grant, we beseech You, Almighty God, that we who deserve to be punished for our evil deeds, may mercifully be relieved by the comfort of Your grace...*
And we celebrate a season of 40 days leading up to Jesus' death on the cross.

The Divine Service is a wasteland for those looking for entertainment.
It is a wilderness for those looking to justify themselves before God.
It is a death sentence – for our Old Adam.

Here our spiritual apathy must die or we will.

Here our nice clean church gets very messy with the filth and stench of our sins.

Here if our eyes cause us to sin, we pluck them out, lest we be thrown in to hell with good vision.

Here if our hand causes us to sin, we cut it off, lest we go to the eternal fire with our whole body.

Here all our idols and preoccupations that distract us from being in God's presence must be drowned with all other sins and evil lusts.

God draws you here so that you can see that there is nothing you can do for your salvation.
And so He has prepared the perfect place to show you His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

Yes, the Divine Service is a death sentence for your Old Adam,
but it is your Old Adam that is bringing you death.

He would starve you of all comfort and peace with God,
of all trust in His almighty Word and works, which He performs for your good and life.

But here, in this wilderness for the Old Adam, He makes you to sit down on green pastures,
and through His servants distributes to you the true Bread of Life sent down from heaven, Himself.
Man does not live by bread alone, we heard Jesus quote a few weeks ago.

But what does man live by? **By every word the proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**

In other words, man lives by Jesus, **the Word made flesh** proceeding from the mouth of God.

Here, you do not work. Here you receive as God works on you and in you,

to forgive you and to nourish and strengthen the New Man in you to cry out, with the psalmist,

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;

My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Here you see death all around you, just as you confess it in the Creed. But it is not your death.
It is the death of an innocent victim, the Lamb of God whose blood was poured out
at the altar of the cross so that the Lord would passover you.

Sacrifices are bloody. The blood gets everywhere and stains what it comes into contact with.

Blessed are you who have been stained with Jesus' blood poured upon you in baptism,
for it has stained your sinful heart with holiness and your robes with righteousness.

Blessed are you who have His blood is sprinkled on you through the absolution,
the Creed and the Sermon, to cleanse your heart and create in you a right spirit.

Blessed are you whose strength is in Jesus as you receive His blood in the cup,
shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Blessed are you who, nourished by the Bread of Life, sing with the psalmist,

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria