

We bow our hearts in prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, Come quickly to help us receive your good gifts of Word and Sacrament so that we may glorify you in our stewardship of them. Amen.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear fellow redeemed,

Last Thursday was Thanksgiving. Was that food still on your mind this morning?

Did you wake up thinking about how full you still are after eating all you did that day?

I am guessing that between Thursday and this morning you probably got hungry again and ate.

Have you ever contemplated how much food plays a role in your life?

It is more than just your energy source. It's how you replenish spent nutrients.

Certain foods can please.... or revolt you. It can make you ill... or aid in healing.

And it is one of the chief things that people use to unite each other as they sit around a table.

But food has had a much deeper role in your life than these fleeting things.

It was by food that we were born spiritually dead; a fruit attached to God's Word of promise.

It was by the theft of a fruit that we are born in pain, live in pain, and return to dust.

It was bad stewardship that got A&E kicked out of the garden, and sent away from the tree of life.

But that is not the end of the sad story, because God intervened.

He desires that you, His child, eat of the Tree of Life and live forever with Him.

And so, He has made a way for that to happen, by the life and death of His own Son,

and the promised Offspring of Eve.

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

The LORD God said to the serpent, "... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

To the woman He said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing...."

And to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."^(ESV)

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

God created us to be receptive beings, meaning that we constantly need to take more in.

This is true of our physical lives where we need to eat and drink a balanced, healthy diet in order to maintain a healthy life.

When we neglect to eat or drink, or constantly over eat or eat only junk food,

then we hurt ourselves, weakening our bodies, making them ill equipped to fight disease.

Food in this respect is also a lesson about our spiritual nature – we are receptive beings here also.

We cannot function properly without a healthy diet of receiving God's good gifts.

We need to hear God's Law preached to us, telling us how we have sinned

so that we can watch and pray through the many and constant temptations to pride. We also need to hear the Gospel of forgiveness and righteousness in Christ, telling us everything that God has done for our salvation, so that we don't despair in our guilt and shame. We need to be baptized... and daily return to our baptism in contrition and repentance, so that we are constantly reminded of who we are – God's children and heirs of eternal life. We need to sit at the family table and partake of Jesus' life-giving body and blood, having communion, that is, unity, with both the Triune God and our baptized siblings. But our spiritual life falls apart when this is not our primary concentration and concern.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve lived in the garden where they received everything they needed. They received God's Word of blessing to be fruitful and multiply. They received His Word of blessing to work and keep the garden. They received His Word of blessing to eat of all the trees, including the Tree of Life. They even received His Word forbidding them to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And as faithful stewards, they perfectly stewarded His Word.

But this completely changed in the fall when they neglected to be stewards of the Word. Eve, instead, listened to the deceptive serpent, and Adam stood nearby doing nothing. Instead of using God's Word, the one tool we have to fight against the devil and his temptations, they grew discontent with it and longed for the lying promises of the devil. When they couldn't steward God's Word correctly, then they couldn't steward anything else. Their receptive hands turned to thieving hands, taking what was not given them. They went from being managers of that Word – using it as God directed them – to acting like owners, deciding on their own how they should or should not use it. Put in another way, they went from being servants of God, to acting like their own gods.

This account is so appropriate for us as we begin a new Church year in the penitential season of Advent. It plays itself out over and over again in our own lives, doesn't it? We also have received a stewardship of God's gifts: of His Word, of Baptism, and Communion. And yet, we fail to use these faithfully. We neglect to receive His Word in private devotion, and instead meditate on worldly thoughts. We despise the preaching of that Word when we fail to gather to hear it regularly. We betray our Baptism when we refuse to confess our sins before God and instead live in them or try to hide them or justify them. We think lightly of the Lord's Supper, as if it is a meal that we do not need to receive regularly. We do not hunger and thirst for the righteousness that God would bless us with through it.

And if we do not steward these gifts faithfully, how do we expect to be faithful stewards of the other things that God has given us: your body and soul, eyes, ears and all your members, your reason and all your senses... food and clothing, home and family, property and goods ... and all you need to support this body and life.

Instead you use these things as if you owned them. Put another way, as if we were your own god. As if you weren't accountable to anyone higher than yourself. As if your highest purpose in life was to make this life as comfortable for you as possible. But this is far from the truth, **Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ...?**

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. ^{1Corinthians6:19-20}

And if your body is not even your own, then neither is your car, or your house, or your children, or your bank account, or your television, or your time, or anything that you consider your own. These are all to be in service to your heavenly Father.

But how can you know how to use these other gifts according to your Father's will if you don't regularly use His Word, if it is not dwelling in you richly day by day; if you are not remembering your Baptismal adoption as God's child; if you are not communing with your Him at His family table, receiving Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and for the nourishment to fight against the temptations ahead?

The fall into sin has made our stewardship so much harder, in fact impossible for us alone. Where we would hide from God and try to cover up our sins of faithless stewardship, He seeks you out and exposes them so that you might be covered, not with wilting fig leaves, but with the permanent clothing of Christ's righteousness, the innocent Offspring of Eve, who came in deep humility to be sacrificed as the payment for your sins. Who, though starving in the wilderness, would not be tempted to play God by taking for Himself loaves of stone, when His Father had not given them. Who earnestly desired to eat the Passover with His disciples before He suffered ^{Luke 22:15} as He instituted the Lord's Supper for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Our stewardship of His Word and sacramental gifts is itself a gift of God, for the Holy Spirit has called, enlightened and sanctified you by His Word and He continues to gather you together into His Church around these gifts, so that you may continue to be in His holy presence without fear or shame.

As His child, you receive your good gifts from your heavenly Father. You learn to give thanks to Him for His blessings, **for His mercy endures forever.** You learn to listen for and to your Savior's voice for what your Father speaks to you in His Word and so you learn to refuse the allurements of the world and to ignore the deceptions the devil. You use what He has given to you for the purposes that He has designed them for, as faithful stewards, not for your own personal gain, but for the gain of His kingdom.

Hold this stewardship close to your heart for there is life in His Words. Take what He so freely gives, for just as sure as His promise to Adam about the Tree of KG&E. So is His promise about the life that He gives in the humble bread and wine that carries with it the body and blood of our crucified and risen Lord. And though you will return to dust in death, you will rise from dust again as an heir of an eternal paradise where **the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit, will yield its fruit each month.** **The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.** ^{Revelation 22:2}

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Soli Deo Gloria