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Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Come Hungry.

*See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.
If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.
But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.
I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Have you ever been invited to a dinner party, and when you ask what you can bring, and the host or hostess says, “Just bring yourself!” Regardless, you fully intend to pick up wine or flowers or something to bring along with you, but the day gets away from you and you get busy. The time arrives and you dash out the door to try to not arrive too, too late. You haven’t really gotten spruced up and you arrive empty handed. When you arrive, you immediately realize this is not just a normal dinner party. This is a beautiful occasion where the host has put thought and care and effort into creating this event. The table is set beautifully. The company is gathered with intention. There are flowers and candles bringing ambiance to the house. You feel awkward, uncomfortable, out of place. But the host greets you with such warmth, pulling you into the room, making introductions, immediately putting you at ease. The evening unfolds with great conversation, laughter, and delicious food. You arrived empty handed but that is long forgotten. You leave feeling satisfied. You leave feeling nourished. You have been filled.

This has happened to me on more than one occasion. An unworthy dinner guest in the company of the gracious, the thoughtful, the well-dressed. But then the host’s graciousness fills in the voids and any omissions on my part go unnoticed. To me, this is an image of the Lord’s Table. Where each of us arrives empty handed, a bit bedraggled. There is nothing we can bring to this meal other than fulfilling the hosts heartfelt request to “Just bring yourself!” On Communion Sunday – this is how we arrive, and it is enough. The work has been done, the meal has been prepared, the guests have been invited. All we can do is take our seat and try to experience the blessings intended for us.

Puritan preacher Thomas Watson wrote, “The Lord’s Supper is a visible sermon.” A visible sermon where God shows us love and mercy by feeding and nourishing the body and soul. The passage of Moses preaching to the Israelites from Deuteronomy reminds me of how the Israelites

spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. And in that time, they had to daily rely on God to feed them manna from heaven. For six days, they could gather it. On the sixth day, they could gather twice as much. And on the seventh day, they were to rest. When they tried to store it overnight, it went rotten. When they went on the seventh day to find more to collect it, they returned empty handed. Each morning they had to nothing in reserve for their daily sustenance. Each day they were reminded of their utter reliance on God. Each day was a visible sermon – God shall supply thy needs. The Lord’s Supper is the sermon reminding us we have nothing sufficient to bring to this table and yet the host welcomes us joyfully again and again.

Come hungry. Leave happy. is the slogan from IHOP – International House of Pancakes. Come hungry is what God asks of us. If we are hungry, truly hungry to experience God, to be blessed through the sacrament, to be spiritually nourished - then while we may not leave happy, we can leave nourished and strengthened for the journey ahead. John Calvin said, “This sacrament is a medicine for poor, spiritually sick people.” Therefore however, you arrived here today, whether you prayerfully prepared yourself for this sacrament or you stumbled into this church feeling morally empty handed, spiritually drained, or just physically weary – you are in the right place.

This is the place where you do not have to provide for yourself. You don’t have to do the planning or the preparing or the cooking or the cleaning. You do not have to be the host. You do not have to be put together. You do not have to do anything but show up hungry, acknowledging a need for something only God can provide.

Maya Angelo’s poem *Alone* begins:

*Lying, thinking, last night
how to find my soul a home
where water is not thirsty,
and bread loaf is not stone,
I came up with one thing
and I don't believe I'm wrong,
that nobody,
but nobody
can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
nobody, but nobody
can make it out here alone.*

Choose life, Moses preaches to the Israelites. Choose life where you live in relationship with God, acknowledging that you can’t make there alone. “Take and eat,” Jesus tells his friends. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.”

In January, I was in Texas with my preaching group and on the last day, we celebrated communion. I had forgotten that we always have communion on the last day. I was going to be catching a flight immediately following our meetings, so I arrived at the chapel with my luggage. I was rushing because I had gone for a run in the morning. The seminaries rooms for visitors do not provide hair

dryers. So, there I was with wet hair, still kind of sweating, carrying my baggage, and I slid into a seat. It was symbolic. Everything had already been prepared. The music was playing, the candles were lit, one of the preachers was officiating, the bread and wine were ready. The familiar words of coming from ‘east and west and north and south’ were proclaimed. And an invitation was offered – it was an invitation to choose life – it was an invitation to be fed – it was an invitation to be forgiven. In that moment, I couldn’t really remember the last time I had been seated for communion. I couldn’t remember a time when I had just shown up at the last minute completely unprepared and had someone else host the meal. In that moment, surrounded by fellow, weary preaching travelers I realized just how hungry I was for that sustenance. I needed to be reminded that Jesus is the host, inviting me to rely on Him.

When Moses says to the Israelites, ‘choose life’, it is in the singular. It is for each one of them to choose God’s path. It was for each and every disciple to ‘take and eat’. The invitation is there for each of us. It is a personal invitation by Jesus to take this bread and drink this cup and remember God’s saving love for each one of us.

There is nothing we can do which will earn us a seat at the table and yet Jesus joyfully, graciously welcomes into this fellowship. We are humbled by his love. We are nourished by his grace. We are saved by his sacrifice.

Thanks to be to God. Jesus came into the world to be a friend to sinners, to be the host at the table, to feed the hungry, to strengthen the weary, to encourage us to choose life, life eternal.

The table is set; just bring yourself and come hungry!

Amen.