

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR
RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED
Matthew 5:6; 26:20-29; Maundy Thursday A; April 1, 2026

Jesus, His disciples, and thousands of other Jewish pilgrims were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. “Festival” is a word that describes feasting, which they did. They feasted on roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and vegetables. It was a joyful celebration in remembrance of God’s saving work of freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. They joyfully drank wine at the feast.

At the first Passover in Egypt, the first-born sons of the Egyptians died because lambs’ blood was not painted on the doorframes of their homes; the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites because of the blood of the lamb. God’s people ate the lamb which strengthened and nourished them for their exodus journey to the promised land. Jesus and His disciples feasted until full on the night He was betrayed; when they were finished with the meal there was no hunger or thirst in them, they were satisfied.

Lent is drawing to a close; our 40-day journey will end at sundown Saturday. The days of Lent traditionally include fasting, not eating for a while, as a discipline against the desires of the sinful flesh and a training of body and mind to obey God. The hunger of fasting reminds us of our need to be saved from sin and death by God.

Before the sadness of tomorrow’s Good Friday commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ, who was hungry and thirsty that day, we have this time of Maundy Thursday feasting. Our feasting tonight is on the Lamb of God roasted on the cross, the body of Christ given for us to eat. Our drink is from the grapes of God’s wrath for our sins. God directed His wrath not against us but against His own Son who shed His blood. We drink Jesus’ blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Though the wafer of Communion bread, which is Jesus’ body, and the sip of wine, which is Jesus’ blood, are physically small and seem insignificant, God satisfies our hunger and quenches our thirst by us eating and drinking them.... that is, if our hunger and thirst is for righteousness.

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In the first paragraph of the “Confessional Address” tonight, we were reminded of what we need from God, which we receive from Him for Jesus’ sake. “This holy Sacrament has been instituted for the special comfort of those who are troubled because of their sin and who humbly confess their sins, fear God's wrath, and hunger and thirst for righteousness” (*LSB Altar Book*, 507). Jesus promised in the fourth Beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount: **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

How can feeling hunger and thirst be a blessing? (Does that imply that we won't be blessed if we aren't hungry and thirsty?) What does it mean to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness? What does it mean to be satisfied/filled up with righteousness?

Hunger and thirst are our bodies' way of telling us we need something to eat and drink to stay alive. To ignore these feelings will eventually lead to weakness and death. The solution to hunger and thirst is simple: have something nourishing to eat and drink.

God's Word of law causes us to feel our guilt for our sins which can be assuaged only by something outside ourselves: God's forgiveness and righteousness. Feeling this need is a blessing, even though the feeling comes with the threat of God's wrath and eternal punishment in hell. Without this hunger and thirst, we would be lost in sin and unbelief and not even realize our terminal condition.

If we don't feel hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are like people with a terminal disease with no symptoms until we drop dead one day unexpectedly. If we have a disease or ailment that will kill us, we want to know it so something can be done about it before we die.

Being hungry and thirsty, even knowing what we are hungry and thirsty for, does not satisfy our hunger and thirst, just like knowing we are unrighteous and sinful does not take away our unrighteousness and forgive our sin. We need to eat and drink something to satisfy hunger and thirst. We need God to fill us with righteousness and forgiveness in Jesus Christ to become righteous and holy before God. Eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper satisfies our hunger and thirst for His righteousness.

The biblical terms “righteousness” and “justification” are related to each other. To be “justified” means being “declared righteous.” To be justified is to be declared not guilty, innocent before God the Judge. To be righteous is being holy and without sin before God. Sinners like us are unrighteous, not holy. We are guilty because we are sinners. We hunger and thirst for the righteousness which we lack. We need to be found righteous before God the Judge or He will condemn and punish us. How can sinners become righteous?

Jesus is righteous and holy, without sin or guilt. Think of being in church tonight in Passover terms. God’s angel of death sent to kill the wicked, passes over our home in the church because the blood of God’s Lamb has been painted on the doorframes. Safe inside, we eat the flesh of the Lamb with the bread and joyfully drink His blood with the wine. When Christians eat and drink Jesus’ body and blood in faith, we receive Jesus’ own righteousness.

On the night He was betrayed to suffer and die on the cross, Jesus took bread, blessed, broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, **“Take, eat; this is My body.”** And over the cup of wine said, **“Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** God forgives our sins because Jesus, filled up with our sins, satisfied all of God’s anger. God carried out all His righteous wrath against His own Son as a slaughtered and roasted Lamb.

Something I find very concerning is that many church members show a lack of hunger or thirst for the Sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood. Members who promised to faithfully come to church to hear God’s Word and receive the Sacrament, have gone months, years, and even decades without coming to the Lord’s Supper? Aren’t they hungry and thirsty for it? Do they think they have no sins in need of forgiving? Don’t they believe that Jesus’ body and blood are for them? They appear to be dying of spiritual hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness in Christ without faith and forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus says to us: **“Take, eat; this is My body which given for you... Take, drink; this My blood which shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.” Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Amen.**