

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday after Trinity, June 16, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 308, 318, 304:3-6, 305, 321.

Lessons: Genesis 45:1-15, Ephesians 4:1-6, Matthew 26:26-28.

Sermon Text: 1 Cor. 10:16-17 and 11:23-29.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You probably learned in Catechism Instruction that a Sacrament is one of the means of grace. Remember, the means of grace are those means by which God offers and gives his grace to us, namely the gospel in the Word of God and the gospel in the sacraments, which is, of course, the same gospel.

You also learned that a sacrament is a sacred act instituted by Christ himself which uses earthly elements connected with the Word of God. And here is the most important part: It is a sacred act in which Christ offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Today let's review

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR, THE LORD'S SUPPER

- 1. What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion?**
- 2. What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking?**
- 3. How can eating and drinking do such great things?**
- 4. Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?**

Please join in reciting or reading, what you have learned from Luther's Small Catechism about The Lord's Supper.

First: What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion?

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

Where is this written?

The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the apostle Paul tell us: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The apostle Paul tells us ***"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"*** You may be familiar with the words of the King James Version: ***"The cup of blessing which we bless"***. Both words are appropriate. This is the Passover cup our Lord used when he instituted the Lord's Supper. He made it the communion cup for which we give thanks, which is blessed when the Words of Institution are used in celebrating the Sacrament of the Altar.

The wine in the cup is a "participation", that is a "communion", or fellowship, a oneness in the blood of Christ. When we drink the wine, we also receive Christ's blood. And when we eat the bread, we also receive Christ's body. Luther used three prepositions: "in", "with", and "under" to explain the relationship between the bread and body, between the wine and blood. The Word of God here stresses the close relationship, the sharing. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we enter into the most intimate fellowship with Christ himself. We are receiving his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

We are joined with Jesus Christ by taking his body and blood into our body. This has been called a vertical fellowship. And as we eat and drink the sacrament, we are also joined with those who are communing with us, the communicant members of our visible congregation and our conference. This has been called a horizontal fellowship. What a remarkable unity and joining this is! How could we possibly hold any ill will toward any of them as we

come to be joined with them in such a sacred meal! This is one reason Christ said ***“if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*** (Matthew 5:23-24) We sing: “Thy table I approach, Dear Savior, hear my prayer; Oh, let no unrepented sin Prove hurtful to me there! Lo, I confess my sins And mourn their wretched bands; A contrite heart is sure to find Forgiveness at Thy hands.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 310:1-2)

Paul goes on ***“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”*** This is the unity we have and express in the Lord’s Supper, the unity of the Holy Spirit spoken of in our Epistle lesson.

Please join again in reciting or reading what you have learned from Luther’s Small Catechism about The Lord’s Supper.

Second: What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking?

That is shown us by these words: “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Our Gospel lesson especially told us of the forgiveness of sins we receive in the sacrament. It is the same forgiveness of sins you hear when we publicly confess our sins in our worship services and receive the announcement of forgiveness. It may be more obvious in our communion liturgy, but the confession of sins and absolution or forgiveness is also present at the beginning of our normal Sunday worship on page 7 in the hymnal. In that confession of sins, the pastor first confesses our sins and then the congregation joins in before hearing the words of forgiveness.

Paul tells us that Jesus said ***“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*** Jesus had fulfilled the Old Covenant, the covenant of circumcision and of the law and now establishes the new covenant, established by the shedding of his blood. Through his blood he entered into a covenant of mercy with all the partakers of this sacrament.

“As oft as ye drink it,” “whenever you drink it,” as many times as you drink it. As often as a believer has a longing and desire for the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, and no matter how often, that certainty is his in Holy Communion. This should be a powerful encouragement to partake of the sacrament frequently, together with the pressure of our sins and the desire for forgiveness.

Please join in reciting or reading the rest of what you have learned from Luther’s Small Catechism about The Lord’s Supper.

Third: How can eating and drinking do such great things?

It is certainly not the eating and drinking that does such things, but the words “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words are the main thing in this sacrament, along with the eating and drinking. And whoever believes these words has what they plainly say, the forgiveness of sins.

Fourth: Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?

Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words: “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words “for you” require nothing but hearts that believe.

Luther makes it clear from God’s Word that it is not the simple eating and drinking that assures one of the forgiveness of sins. For one can eat and drink anywhere – at home, in a restaurant, in friends’ homes. But this is the sacrament of the Lord’s body and blood. Previously Paul had admonished the Corinthians for thinking that their shared meals – sort of like our share-the-food or pot-luck meals but with people eating only their own food – was the Lord’s Supper. With these words he teaches them correctly. He later warns ***“If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.”***

Our text says ***“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.”***

Holy Communion demands a most careful preparation on the part of the communicant: If one eats the bread, or drinks the cup of the Lord, unworthily, he is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. To eat and drink unworthily

is to be in such a spiritual condition as to harbor unrepented sins or sins we just don't want to let go of. Should a person come to the Lord's Supper as he would go to any other meal, considering his actions to be the mere eating of bread and the mere drinking of wine, if he feels neither desire for the grace of God nor devotion at the prospect of partaking in the miracle feast, then such a person will be guilty, not merely of a thoughtless eating and drinking, but of desecration of the body and blood of the Lord. He will show that he has neither a concept of his sinfulness nor a longing for the grace of God; and thus his guilt will consist in his hindering the grace of God in the Sacrament, which is ready to bestow upon him forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

This is why we have a special confession of sins at the beginning of each communion service. Personal preparation is also important, lest someone come to church and realize "Oops, we have Lord's Supper today. I suppose I should go." For this reason, Luther wrote the Christian questions, printed at the end of your catechism book.

It follows, then, that every earnest Christian should examine himself, make a careful test of his own mind and attitude, explore all the secret recesses of his heart, not merely to see if he is religiously and morally qualified and personally worthy of being a guest of the Lord's, but, as our liturgy very properly says, to see whether he heartily repents of his sins, believes in Jesus Christ, and sincerely and earnestly intends to amend his sinful life. (The Lutheran Hymnal, page 48) Having made this kind of personal examination, preferably with the aid of the questions in the part of the catechism dealing with confession, and in the Table of Duties, and in the Christian Questions offered in our Small Catechism, a Christian may come and partake of God's meal of grace. The purpose of the admonition is not to deter and scare away such Christians in whom self-examination reveals many sins in thoughts, words, and deeds, but to stimulate the proper desire for the grace of God.

Luther wrote that if you did not want to receive the Sacrament unless you were free from all sins, it would follow that you would never go to the Sacrament. But those who knowingly continue in sins receive the Sacrament unworthily. For the Sacrament has been instituted by Christ the Lord, not that people should remain in sins, but that they should obtain forgiveness and grow in sanctification. If one abstains from the Sacrament for whatever reason except unrepented sins, the devil has gotten a firm hold of one's life.

Be sure to beware of this and get into the habit of going often, especially if you find that your heart is heavy on account of your sins, in order that you may not forget our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but remember his sacrifice and death. This is the meaning of having hearts that believe, of having faith. Jesus asks nothing else of us.

But of the unworthy the apostle says: For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment, condemnation, to himself, because he does not discern or recognize, the body of Christ. He makes no distinction between an ordinary meal and this heavenly meal; he does not realize that the true body and blood of his Savior are here present, and that for this reason a thoughtless use of the Sacrament is blasphemy and results in the final righteous punishment of God. For whoever approaches the table of the Lord in such a spirit of frivolousness will indeed also receive the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine, but not as that of his Redeemer, rather as that of his Judge, who will, on the last day, demand an account of him with sharp reckoning, since the outward behavior is only an indication and demonstration of the unbelief of the heart. We teach, believe, and confess also that there is only one kind of unworthy guest, namely those who do not believe, as Scripture says, ***"He that believeth not is condemned already."*** (John 3:18)

And so we rightly teach "Who should not be admitted to the Lord's Supper?"

- A. Those who are manifest unbelievers.
- B. Those who are manifestly impenitent, that is, plainly impenitent.
- C. Those who are of a different faith "Those who are of a different faith" means those who do not believe or teach the same as we do. We practice "Close Communion", not "Open Communion".
- D. Those who have not been instructed in the truth and hence cannot "remember" the Lord's death.
- E. Those who are not able to examine themselves.
- F. Those who have caused offense and have not removed it."

And so, please remember that we receive Holy Communion because it forgives sins, strengthens faith, encourages each other, and gives strength for Christian living! That is why our Lord Jesus Christ gave us his body and his blood in this sacrament. Amen.