

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifth Sunday In Lent, April 2, 2017

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

Hymns: 304, 305:9, 306:1-4, 313, 311:1-2.

Lessons: Ex. 12:1-30, 1 Cor. 11:20-29, Mt. 26:26-28 AND Mk. 14:22-24.

Sermon Text: Luke 22:19-22.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Faith is necessary to believe all of God's promises. Yet when we get to the Lord's Supper, it seems that a special measure of faith is necessary. For Christ tells us something that has been impossible for many humans to believe.

We must suspend human reason when Christ institutes the Lord's Supper, or, as Luther once put it, 'poke out the eyes of our reason.'

We must totally let faith take over as we today examine

WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR?

- 1. It is the true body of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread.**
- 2. It is the true blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the wine.**

This sacrament is also called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, the Breaking of Bread, and the Eucharist.

With Luther we ask and answer the question: 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."

Jesus said. He, the Son of God, who did not sin, who never lies, tells us that the Sacrament of the Altar is his body and blood.

The occasion for this is "the same night he was betrayed." That is Thursday evening of the week between the day we call Palm Sunday and the day Jesus rose from the dead. That is the night Jesus and his disciples were gathered in an upper room to celebrate the Passover. But it was the night of "the last Passover" and "The First Lord's Supper". Within 24 hours he would be dead, having given his body and blood into death for the forgiveness of sins. On this evening he gives that same body and that same blood to his disciples for the forgiveness of sins.

His disciples, as Jews, were familiar with all the laws God had set up for celebrating the Passover as well as the customs of the Jewish Passover. This was an annual commemoration of the time when God delivered his people, the descendants of Jacob, who was also called "Israel", from slavery in Egypt.

Often in Scripture we see that slavery is used as a symbol for sin. The Passover is a symbol for deliverance. Just as God's chosen people were delivered from the slavery in Egypt, we, through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ are delivered from sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus says literally “this my body”, “this my blood” in the Greek which means only one thing: “this is my body”, “this is my blood”. There is no way that we can explain this other than believing the words Jesus tells us.

However, men just don’t want to accept and believe what Jesus really says. Men have to be able to explain things so their human reason can understand it. The closest we can come is with Luther’s use of three prepositions: in, with, and under. Accepting and believing the words of Christ, we can only explain that in, with, and under the bread and wine we are really, truly receiving the true body and blood of Jesus Christ.

This is probably the most significant difference among Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Orthodox Lutheran churches. Notice that I used the term “Orthodox Lutheran”, that is, correct teaching Lutheran churches. I use that term today because the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) consistently practices open communion. For example, at a family funeral in an ELCA church I (Pastor Mehlretter) heard the pastor invite everyone in the family group – and he specifically mentioned Catholics and Methodists – to receive communion. How do we identify Catholic and Reformed churches? Catholic churches usually have the word “Catholic” in their name. Churches claiming to have some Lutheran heritage usually have the word “Lutheran” in their name. If a church does not identify itself as either Catholic or Lutheran, it is probably to be considered “Reformed” and, if it has communion at all, it follows the teachings we call “Reformed”.

Men have come up with two false teachings to explain away the words of Jesus. The first is the unscriptural teaching of the Catholic Church, both Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic, called “transubstantiation”. This teaches that when the priest blesses or consecrates the bread and wine it is changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. According to this teaching, the bread is no longer bread, but only the body of Christ, and the wine is no longer wine, but it is the blood of Christ. This, of course, leads to some problems. Any bread or wine that has been blessed, or ‘consecrated’ must be carefully cared for. Any bread that is not eaten must be stored in such a way and such a place to be safe and secure, lest someone – or some animal such as a mouse – eat it, for it is now Christ’s body and only Christ’s body. In addition, all the wine that is consecrated is drunk at that time. Until recently, it was drunk only by the priest. Why? If you have ever tried to put a cup to someone else’s lips so they can drink, there is a danger of spilling it. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that when you receive the body of Christ, you are also receiving the blood of Christ, because in every sliver of flesh – have you ever scraped your skin and looked at what peeled off? – there is a certain amount of blood from the capillaries between the cells of your flesh. Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic logic to explain away the plain, clear words of Christ.

From 1 Corinthians 10:16 we learn that the bread is the "communion" of the body of Christ. Thus not only the body but also the bread must be present. ***“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”*** 1 Corinthians 10:16 (KJV) It takes at least two things to make a communion, a joining. In this case it is body and bread, and blood and wine.

Reformed teaching we call “representation”. This unscriptural, logical human explanation means that the bread and wine only represent the body and blood of Christ, for how can we eat it if Jesus himself is in heaven? Reformed churches teach that the words of Christ, "This is my body" must be taken in a figurative sense, namely, that the bread merely represents the absent body of Christ, which is in heaven. Yet none of Jesus’ words here can possibly have a figurative meaning. "This" refers to the bread which Christ gave to his disciples. — "Is" always means "is" and in no human language does it ever mean signify or represent.

"Body" is clearly defined as Christ's real body by the words "given for you". It is true that the Church is called the body of Christ but the Church is not that body of Christ which was given for us into death. What is true of the words "This is my body" is true also of the words "this is my blood". Both sentences must be taken in their plain and literal sense. Four times the words of institution are recorded in the Bible, and in no text do we find an indication that these words must be understood in any other way than they read.

Orthodox Lutheran teaching assures us that Christ meant what he said. The body and blood of Christ are truly, really present in, with, and under the bread and the wine when we eat the bread and drink the wine. This we call the doctrine of real presence. How, we cannot logically explain. We accept this on faith because Jesus says so. Let me give an example. (Hold up your Bible.) When I say “this my Bible” or “this is my Bible” I don’t mean that it has been changed into my Bible. I don’t mean that it represents my Bible. It is my Bible.

The prepositions used by Luther: "in, with, and under", do not indicate a special place where the body and blood can be located, but simply mean that together with the bread and wine we receive the body and blood. And this is what the words of institution clearly teach. Christ took "bread" and gave it to His disciples, and they actually ate bread. But at the same time he informs them "This is my body, which is given for you". There is a communion between this bread and the body of Christ. So the disciples ate, together with the bread, also the body of Christ. The same is true of the wine and the blood. Four things, then, are really and truly present, distributed, and received by all communicants: bread and body, wine and blood. While we can understand the meaning of Christ's words, we cannot comprehend or understand how this can be. And we are not expected to understand it, but are to believe that Christ by his almighty power joins his body and blood to the bread and wine in the Sacrament.

And so if the orthodox Lutheran pastor drops a communion wafer or spills the wine, he is dropping bread and spilling wine. He is not dropping the body of Christ on the floor or spilling the blood of Christ. It is in the eating and the drinking that we receive the body and blood of Christ.

We use unleavened bread because that is the kind of bread, bread made without yeast, that Jesus used. The Jews were to have no yeast in the house at Passover. The ingredients are simply flour and water. We drink grape wine because Jesus used the fruit of the vine, grape wine at the Passover.

What the Lord's Supper really is, we can learn from the Bible alone. What a church teaches and believes concerning this Supper, we can learn only from its public confessions. If the teaching of a church on this point does not agree with the teaching of the Bible, then that church does not have the Supper which Christ instituted, but a supper of its own invention. It is not enough that bread and wine be eaten and drunk, and that the words of institution are recited, but the words must admittedly be taken in that sense in which Christ used them. Neither the Reformed nor the Catholic Churches have the Supper Christ instituted. In the churches of our day we find three different doctrines concerning the essence of this Sacrament.

What is the meaning of the Consecration? We consecrate the earthly elements by reciting the words of Institution, thereby indicating that we are about to celebrate that Supper which Christ instituted with these words, and thereby setting this bread and wine aside for this sacred use.

The Bible does not record the words with which Christ blessed the bread and the cup. We recite the words of Institution. These words do not work like magic, as though by their mere recitation the communion of the bread and the wine on the altar were brought about with the body and the blood of Christ, for this was done by the words Christ spoke at the first Supper, and this communion exists only with the bread we actually eat and with the wine we actually drink, and not with what falls to the floor, is spilled, or left on the altar.

As we continue in our review of the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper we shall be reminded of the use we are to make of the bread and the wine. We shall hear what blessings we receive in the Lord's Supper. But today we must at least mention the blessings we receive through this eating and drinking. Luther taught us: 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. Amen.