

"GIVEN AND SHED FOR YOU"

The Lord's Supper for Lent



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Given and Shed for You – The Lord’s Supper for Lent

Written by: Rev. Marcus Baikie, Rev. Travis Berg, Rev. Paul Cain,
Rev. Rene Castellero, Rev. Timothy Fitzner, Rev. Ryan Loeslie,
Rev. Joshua Scheer

Editor: Rev. Joshua Scheer
Cover Art: Rev. Roberto Rojas Jr.

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STEADFAST PRESS

Believe. Teach. Confess.

To the glory of our Triune God
and for the Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she is found.

“Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood Be for my soul the highest good”

This refrain is sung many times throughout the Church Year, usually during the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar. Like most hymns, it is a prayer, a praise, and a teaching in song form. In this short refrain we confess both the divinity (Lord) and humanity (body, blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with His work of our salvation (the highest good). We also confess the goal of partaking in the Sacrament of the Altar.

This is the sixth devotion in a six-year series on Luther’s Small Catechism. This Lenten season our devotion and services are focused on the Lord’s Supper. In them we plan to follow the pattern of instruction laid down by the great Reformer of blessed memory, Dr. Luther. What is the Supper? What benefit is it to you? How can it do that? How do we receive it properly? These questions will be answered and taught throughout the devotion of this season in the same way – by the Word of the Lord. The Scriptures teach us of this treasure, and so we learn from the Scriptures and confess our doctrine from those same Scriptures.

The pattern of the weeks remains the same as we have been accustomed. The Sunday devotions are modeled upon the great Gospel lessons of the one-year lectionary, following the historic pattern of weeks as we go through Lent. The devotions throughout the week are focused on passages that have to do with what midweek services focus on. Each Saturday particular topics related to the Lord’s Supper are taken up and taught. All of it is meant to remind you and your household of this treasure that our Lord Jesus Christ instituted for the benefit and blessing of His Church.

Ultimately this devotion is meant to draw you to faithfully partake in the Sacrament often. It is meant to catechize you so that you know and believe what is offered in, with, and under that bread that is placed into your hand or onto your tongue. It is meant to catechize you so that you know and believe is in, with, and under the wine in that cup or those cups as you drink from them. Christ’s body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

May your reading of these devotions be blessed. May your going to the services your congregation provides be blessed. May your partaking of the Lord’s body and blood be blessed.

In Christ,

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer
Steadfast Lutherans

Of special note: “Christian Questions and their Answers” from the Small Catechism is included at the end of this devotional to use a preparation tool to get ready to receive the Sacrament of the Altar.

““And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16–18, ESV)

Today is the beginning of the season of Lent. It is a penitential season, meaning that it involves reflection both upon your sinfulness towards God and your fellow men as well as what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

As we take up the Lord’s Supper, we encounter on Ash Wednesday the teaching of Jesus about bodily fasting. Here, we find the contrast between the faithful use of fasting and the unfaithful. Note Jesus says “when” you fast, not “if” you fast. Fasting is good for us, especially as the baptized of God seeking to daily die to sin. It teaches our flesh that it is not in control. It is a great individual discipline, and it is certainly fine, outward training.

That said, it is not done for outward recognition. The hypocrites of Jesus’ day used fasting to gain attention and respect from others. They did not benefit in any spiritual way from what they did. They allowed the bodily training to be used to puff up their pride and standing before others. That is the opposite of what fasting ought to do. The hypocritical use of fasting will not kill the sinful nature, but feed into it. That is what Jesus rebukes here.

Instead, this season take up true fasting – teaching your flesh that you, as a child of God are in control – that you don’t live by earthly bread but by the Word of God. A good practice is to fast on certain days during Lent. A salutary practice some have found helpful is to fast from any food on a Sunday until you eat at the Lord’s Supper. Whatever fasting you practice, do so for good spiritual reasons (increased time for prayer, mortification of the flesh), not for attention from others.

Lord Jesus, by Your Holy Spirit help us to take up the discipline of fasting in the right way. Help us to believe Your Word about denying our sinful nature and to put into practice good and godly disciplines. Amen.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 1 Corinthians 11:23

Throughout this devotion you will be called back to four main passages of Scripture that we know as the four different occurrences of the Words of Institution. They each differ in certain ways from one another, but they all contribute to the Words of Institution that we hear during the Divine Service. What we have in the hymnal is a proper and faithful conflation of those four different accounts, just as we do in the Small and Large Catechisms.

First, repetition is the mother of all learning. Do not skip those lessons because they seem to repeat. Learning happens in that repetition. On top of this, the repetition also builds discipline. Yes, repetition can lead to familiarity and misuse through carelessness or apathy, but the Christian is called to discipline. The flesh wants to be bored. We are to deny the flesh. Going over the same passages is part of that discipline. It is no less the Word of God the tenth time we read the Bible than it was the first time.

Second, the principle of going back to the Words of Institution is a very Lutheran practice. Our fathers in the faith decided early on in the Reformation that the teachings around the Lord's Supper are taught in the Words of Institution that we have from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians. This was very important in both confronting the errors of the medieval Roman Catholic Church as well as the overreactions of the Radical Reformers like Zwingli and the Anabaptists. Other passages may be brought in of course, but the main passages (*sedes doctrinae*) for the Supper are those which record its institution on the night when our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed. This is a very good practice and brings a simple faithfulness that help us to understand the Supper.

Lord Jesus, we give You thanks for Your Supper. Help us to treasure it always and take our doctrine of it from Your Word. Amen.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42, ESV)

The Christians who were converted by the preaching of Peter and baptized at Pentecost devoted themselves to the things of the Church. This devotion is not just some weak will, but true steadfast devotion and dedication to the things of God.

The Apostles teaching is doctrine. This is what the Apostles taught – what Jesus taught them (Matthew 28:20). Christians are devoted to the doctrine handed down from Christ to the Apostles. That includes the doctrine around the Lord’s Supper. This is what we confess when we confess our faith in the “apostolic church” in the Nicene Creed.

The “fellowship” is another word that is often used in with the congregation gathering together, being knit together by the Holy Spirit. This being knit together is worked in the Lord’s Supper and is most manifest in the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is our highest display of unity as Christians. This ties into the very next thing, the breaking of the bread, which as it turns out is the Holy Spirit through the Evangelist Luke’s phrase for the Lord’s Supper. Christians are devoted to each other and to the Supper of our Lord, which confesses our unity, knits us together, increases our faith in Jesus, and grows our love for each other as well.

Finally, the Christians devoted themselves to the prayers. This is a formal set of prayer often associated with the public worship of the Church. Gathered together (fellowship) to hear the Word (to be taught doctrine) and receive the supper (breaking of the bread), the Christians prayed in public worship (prayer of the Church). We devote ourselves to things that are important. The Scriptures give us this example.

Lord Jesus, by Your Holy Spirit make us devoted to Your teaching, the doctrine of the blessed Scriptures, to our congregations, to Your Supper, and to public worship and prayer. Amen.

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:28–29, ESV)

CLOSED COMMUNION

Many Christians are not fond of the practice of Closed Communion. Often it divides families, and congregations and visitors do not perceive it as welcoming. Maybe hardest of all is just that it takes work and real pastoral care. It does not allow for laziness in our houses of worship. Most pastors are diligent to teach about it, but they are often shut out or their teaching doesn't stick when so many other voices would drown it out.

We practice Closed Communion for two main reasons. The first is that the Lord's Supper can be taken to one's harm when the true body and blood of Jesus are not recognized. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11, **“For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”** Therefore, we do not allow unbelievers or random strangers to the Sacrament. This is usually readily understood.

But what about my relative from the other church who believes the true body and blood of Jesus are present?! Here we should consider St. Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 5, **“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”** Paul reminds us that the Christian faith is all about reconciliation, beginning with how we are reconciled to God in Christ. Certainly, then, we ought to make an effort to be reconciled to one another as Christians. This is not just on an interpersonal level, but our innermost Christian convictions should also be reconciled before we go to the altar and enjoy communion with one another. This is what God would have us do. Basic Christianity requires it. If you and your relative from the other church don't really know where your division lies, ask your pastor. He will help you.

True Christians don't begrudgingly practice Closed Communion. They embrace it and wouldn't have it any other way. If we remain committed to our congregations and the doctrine which we have been taught, Closed Communion does not have to be a problem. It helps us confess what the Lord's Supper is. Even more, it moves us to live and behave like Christians.

Lord Jesus, help us to reject false ideas that make us doubt the teaching of Your Word. Help us to firmly believe and practice as Your Word declares. Help our pastor be faithful to Your Word. Amen.



Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4)

“But he answered, ‘It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”” (Matthew 4:4, ESV)

Lent 1 deals with temptation. The devil seeks to tempt us into unbelief, despair and other great shame and vice. At the dawn of time, Satan tempted our first parents and overcame them. But now Christ, the Second Adam, endures each temptation common to man and surmounts them. He stands firm when we so often fall, and that is our comfort and our trust.

So what does the temptation of Christ have to do with what the Lord’s Supper is? There is the temptation that earthly food becomes our idol, that’s true. But there is a subtle temptation which goes the other way. It is inevitable that many, even in the church, attempt to twist the words of Christ, either out of ignorance or for malicious purposes. If man does not live by bread alone, then why do we need the Lord’s Supper? What can eating a bit of bread do? Shouldn’t we focus rather on the words of Christ? Isn’t Scripture better than a gluten snack?

But let us actually ponder the words that come from God’s mouth. Does mere eating and drinking save? Certainly not! But what do the words written in the Bible say? “Take, eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26). The words from Jesus’ mouth say that this bread is His body. When we live by His words, then we will take and eat His body in, with, and under the bread. If you live by these words, that is, believe them, you have exactly what they say. You have Jesus’ body for the forgiveness of your sins.

Yes, man does not live by bread alone. He lives by the bread which is blessed with the Word coming from the mouth of Jesus. A morsal of bread combined with Jesus’ word does save and it gives eternal life.

Lord Jesus, You have taught us that man does not live by bread alone. Remind us of the words written in the Scriptures so that we might have full confidence as we receive Your body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. Amen.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” (Psalm 23:5, ESV)

When we look around at the world, as the psalmist does, we see enemies. We see strife, murder, hatred. We see hatred of God in the perverse movements of our day, the hatred of Christians, the despising and profaning of God’s institutions like marriage. We see a hatred of our fellow man in shootings, the murder of the unborn, the unjust seeking out of wars. All around us, we see enemies.

This is where Psalm 23 shines. It is not a saccharine gospel, syrupy-sweet and sentimental. The psalmist is under no illusions about how the world is. There is the valley of the shadow of death, through which all men must pass. And, in the portion selected for our meditation today, we see enemies. And these enemies are not simply “out there.” These enemies sit at table with us. They are mothers, sisters, and brothers. They are fellow congregational and synodical members. They may be our enemies on account of doctrine. Or they may be our enemies on account of personality conflicts. No matter the issue, they are enemies.

But the Bible says: **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”** Our Lord Jesus truly does rule in the midst of His enemies. He comes to us to prepare a heavenly repast. He is the Host and He is also the meat and drink. He anoints our heads with the oil, the Holy Spirit given in baptism, to prepare us for this feast. And despite the hatred of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, despite all of these enemies, we still feast with and on God in the Lord’s Supper.

We pray in the general prayer that God would turn the hearts of our enemies. God grant it! May they turn from their evil ways and feast with us, side by side at the communion rail. But even if they remain our enemies, we are confident and comforted. Our feasting is not marred by them. Our cups overflow with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Lord Jesus, You feed us in the midst of our enemies. Break their will and may Your gracious will, the forgiveness of sins, be done among us. Amen.

“and all ate the same spiritual food... Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” (1 Corinthians 10:3,5, ESV)

1 Corinthians 10 presents the Old Testament foundation for 1 Corinthians 11. Here, Paul points us back to the time between the Exodus and the Conquest of Canaan, the forty years wandering in the wilderness. This history is instructive, especially when we look at the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Paul makes the point that the Old Testament church was a sacramental church. They were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea. All ate the bread of angels, manna from heaven. All drank pure water from the rock. Every single Israelite received these signs and testimonies of God's will toward them. These signs and testimonies showed that God loved Israel and desired their repentance and salvation.

And yet, we hear that God was not pleased with most of them and that they perished in the wilderness. Indeed, all but two of that generation, Joshua and Caleb, fell in the wilderness, never to enter God's rest. Why? They were baptized. They ate and drank spiritual food. What was lacking? Why was God not pleased?

Even the unbeliever, if he comes to the table, eats Jesus' body and blood. Jesus' body and blood are objectively there. He does receive the Lord. But he does not receive Jesus rightly. He does not receive Jesus for his salvation, but rather to his judgment. Why was God not pleased with the Israelites? Why do we so zealously guard the communion rail? It's because Jesus is truly, objectively present in His body and blood. And that holy body and blood destroys and judges the unbeliever.

The Lord's Supper must be taken in faith. Faith pleases God. Faith grasps on to Jesus' body and blood in the Sacrament and says: Amen, I believe. The sacraments must be used in faith; that pleases God.

Lord Jesus, faith alone pleases You. Grant that the Sacraments awaken and confirm faith in us, so that we might please You and enter into Your rest. Amen.

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘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.’” (Matthew 26:26–28, ESV)

These words of Jesus are the New Testament. This is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:33, 34)

Here, Jesus does something radical. He commands us to drink His blood. This was unheard of. Since the days of Noah, blood was forbidden. A man cannot drink blood, for in the blood there is life. To drink blood was to find your life in a creature. That is idolatry. This is why the drinking of blood was forbidden.

Christ bids them to drink His blood. Why? Jesus is true God and true Man. His blood is God’s blood. We Christians do not find our life anywhere else than in Jesus. He is our life. His blood was shed so that we might be saved. And He gives us His blood as a pledge that all of our sins are truly forgiven.

Jesus promises true life. Jesus promises true forgiveness. Something true cannot come from something that is false or imaginary. Imaginary blood does not give true life. True blood gives true life. True blood gives true forgiveness. If Christ is not present in His supper, then all of this is fake and playacting. But Jesus is bodily present in His supper. And that is the difference between reality and illusion.

Lord Jesus, You established Your New Testament, giving us a sacred pledge. Enlighten our minds so that we may only seek our life in Your sacred body and blood. Amen.

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16, ESV)

It is hard for us not to delve into questions concerning the Lord’s Supper and come up with pet theories. How is this bread and this wine also Jesus’ body and blood? One answer that some give is called transubstantiation. It is a belief that the bread and the wine stop being the bread and the wine. It may look like bread and wine, but it’s not really bread and wine. The essence or whatness of the bread and wine is replaced with Jesus’ body and blood. This is the view of many Roman Catholics.

What are we to think about transubstantiation? Well, we should do what we always do. We return to the fountainhead of Israel, the Sacred Scriptures. What does the Bible say? Well, the Bible says, “the bread which we break.” Here, the Holy Spirit through St. Paul is very, very clear. In the Lord’s Supper, we consume both bread and Jesus’ body. In the Lord’s Supper, we consume what is in the cup, that is, wine, and Jesus’ blood. We don’t know how this happens. We don’t have a theory for it. But we believe the plain words of Scripture. Scripture says the bread and wine remain and it also says that eating and drinking them are a participation in Jesus’ body and blood.

This should warn us. God’s Words should not be pressed into a theory. If they are, then bad things happen. And look at the bad things which come from a belief in transubstantiation. There is the sacrifice of the Mass, where the Supper is turned into our work. There is the reservation, procession, and praying to the host, which is against Jesus’ clear words, “Eat, drink.” This is bad because it goes against the clear words of Scripture. Let God’s Word stand, even if we do not understand how it could be.

Lord Jesus, save us from pet theories and help us to cling to Your precious Word alone. Amen.

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”
(John 10:9, ESV)

This week we have spoken about the real, bodily presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. But there are many Christians out there who still do not believe this. You may know some. And maybe you yourself struggle with Jesus’ bodily presence. Maybe, you think to yourself, Jesus is simply using “is” as “represents.” I mean, look at John 10. Jesus isn’t really a door, right? So, maybe when Jesus says, “This is my body,” He is saying this represents my body.

But this thinking falls flat. Let us take John 10:9. When Jesus says, “I am the Door,” He is not saying that He signifies or represents a door. No, Jesus is really the Door. He is not a regular door, but He is the true, spiritual Door by which men enter into the kingdom of heaven. His words, “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture,” explain Jesus’ words. Here, Jesus makes the word “Door” into a new word. He fills it with new, spiritual meaning.

Is means Is. Even where figurative language is used, is still means is. Otherwise, the Bible misspeaks when it says that Christ is the Lamb of God. If “is” means “represents,” then Christ represents the Lamb of God and is less than the Lamb of God because He is merely a sign. How foolish! No, “Lamb” here is a new word. Christ really is the Lamb, the true and real sacrifice which is pleasing to God, who surpasses the paschal lamb.

If this is true of pictorial language, how truer it is for the Lord’s Supper. There, Jesus is very clear. There’s no, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Jesus says that this bread is His body and that this cup is His blood.

Don’t be fooled. We don’t need more politicians or theologians who sophistically say: “It depends on the meaning of is.” No, a seven-year-old child can tell you what “is” means.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the confidence that “is” really means “is” in the Lord’s Supper. Amen.

“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—” (1 Corinthians 11:33, ESV)

ONLINE “COMMUNION”

In the past few years some pastors and congregations have thought that they can celebrate the Lord’s Supper online through a computer screen. Only thirty years ago no one would have foreseen this, but this is a topic which has caused much debate today.

The easiest way to settle this is to say that Jesus didn’t do it this way. It wasn’t part of His institution. He gathered His disciples with Him and used His Supper as a way to strengthen their communion with one another. We also can turn to St. Paul as he instructs us about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul twice writes the phrase, **“when you come together.”** It is requisite for the right celebration of the Lord’s Supper that the congregation comes together. This is also why we don’t celebrate the Supper in the privacy of our homes. Jesus instituted His Supper to be an act of public worship which not only affords us communion with Himself, but also with one another.

We would do well to remember here that the Lord’s Supper is indeed a meal. You maybe do not go to the Lord’s Supper to fulfill your body’s nutritional needs, but it is a meal nonetheless. Whenever you have your meals, you also enjoy them with good company. Sharing a meal is one of the most intimate of human interactions. While visiting loved ones through the computer screen has become a more normal way of life for those who live at a distance, it sounds rather absurd to join someone for a meal online. If this would be our attitude towards common meals, certainly our reverence should be greater for the regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus gave us His Supper to bring his congregation closer together. An online observance of the Lord’s Supper does the exact opposite. It sends the message that it is perfectly fine that we are apart, and it reinforces this understanding. It has catered to laziness in our congregations, holding up the twin idols of comfort and convenience. God’s people can do better. For certainty’s sake, let us do it the way Jesus instituted His Supper for us.

Lord Jesus, thank You for the Sacrament of the Altar. Help us all to gather around the altar of our congregation for Your meal. Restrain and convert those who practice things that profane Your name among us. Amen.



The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15)

Second Sunday in Lent

Matthew 15:21-28

“Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15:28, ESV)

Though we are commanded to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), it is often a great need that moves us to prayer. That isn’t wrong; God also tells us that we are to “call upon Me in the day of trouble.” And His promise in response is, “I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Psalm 50:15)

But God’s deliverance comes in His own time and according to His own will, not ours. The Canaanite woman in this Sunday’s Gospel is proof of that. Her great need, a daughter severely oppressed by a demon, moved her to call upon Jesus for mercy. At first Jesus ignored her, and then He dismissed her because she was a Gentile, and then He called her a dog. Hardly the response that one would expect from the gracious and merciful Lord! But the Canaanite woman was not deterred. She clung to her Lord Jesus in faith. Her response to His responses was, “Yes, Lord.” And in the end, Christ delivered her. He granted her request and healed her daughter.

On the night of His betrayal, our Lord instituted the Sacrament of the Altar to meet our greatest need: deliverance from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. Christ has granted us this very deliverance, not with signs and wonders that dazzle the eyes, but through eating and drinking bread and wine in faith, trusting Jesus’ Word that it is truly His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. It may not be the way that we would expect forgiveness, life, and salvation to be given, but it is the way God has perfectly willed to give them. For the blessing of the Sacrament, we glorify God through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise and glorify You, for You have heard our cries for mercy and given us Your holy Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

“Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.” (Psalm 111:1, ESV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread and gave thanks. In the same way also He took the cup after supper and gave thanks. In giving thanks, Jesus continued to fulfill the Law on our behalf, specifically the Second Commandment, just as He had when He fed the five thousand (Matthew 14; Mark 6; Luke 9; John 6) and the four thousand (Matthew 15; Mark 8). So also are we instructed to receive our food with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:3-5). To give thanks is to confess our faith in our Heavenly Father, who leads us by His Holy Spirit to realize that He is the One who gives daily bread to us and to everyone.

If it is proper that we give thanks to God for the gift of daily bread, which supports this body and life, how much more so should we give thanks for the heavenly bread of which we partake in the Lord’s Supper, which is the very Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with the cup of salvation, which holds the wine that is His very Blood! And that thankfulness should only deepen with our faith in these words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” To believe that the Son of God has given His Body and Blood under bread and wine to us Christians that we might eat and drink them and have forgiveness, life, and salvation should lead us to thank Him with all that is within us.

The Lutheran Confessions call this the “eucharistic sacrifice, which...is practiced by those who have been reconciled, so that we may give thanks or return gratitude for the forgiveness of sins that has been received.” (Apology XXIV:19) As those who have received forgiveness through Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Sacrament, let us “give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever!” (*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 200)

**We give thanks to You, almighty God, for the salutary gift of Your Son’s Supper.
Amen.**

“All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.” (Exodus 12:47–48, ESV)

The Lord’s Passover was not meant for everyone. The Gentile foreigner who merely lived among the Israelites and the hired worker who was only among them for a time were not to partake of this meal instituted by God Himself. It was for His holy people, and they were commanded to keep it faithfully. But His holy people were not just those who were of the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was faith that made one a true child of Abraham. If a foreigner believed in the God of Israel and was circumcised, he too would be worthy to eat and drink the Lord’s Passover.

At His last Passover meal, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. This is no coincidence. For Christ is our Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for the sins of the world (1 Corinthians 15:7). His Body and Blood, given and shed on the cross on Good Friday, is now distributed to His holy people to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins.

Not all are meant to eat and drink this Sacrament but only Christians. In fact, the Scriptures warn that those who eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner (that is, in doubt and disbelief) are guilty concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27). But for those who are worthy and well-prepared to receive this Sacrament (that is, those who have faith in Jesus’ Word from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages), Christ’s Body and Blood are for them the highest good.

Lord God, You have called us out of darkness to be Your beloved children. Grant us faith in Your Son’s words, that we might always be counted worthy to share in this blessed Sacrament. Amen.

“And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’” (Mark 14:22–24, ESV)

It was not only the night of the Passover when Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. It was also the night of His betrayal. It was the night when He would pray in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night when He would be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes with a kiss from one of his twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, the night when He would be deserted by the rest, denied by Peter, blasphemed and falsely accused by the Jewish religious leaders, mocked and beaten and spit upon by the Romans soldiers, and finally condemned to death by Pontius Pilate at the cries of the crowd. The next day, Good Friday, He would be crucified, not only suffering the intense physical pain of the cross but also the very wrath of God against Him as He became a curse for us and bore the sins of the whole world.

Without a doubt Jesus knew that all this was about to take place. He had foretold it several times earlier in His ministry. He knew that He was about to die, that His blood would be poured out to make atonement for the sins of mankind. He knew all that He would suffer. Yet right before all that would happen, He instituted the Lord’s Supper, giving to His Church His holy Body and precious Blood under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith. Behold the depths of Jesus’ love, that His heart and mind should be directed toward His beloved disciples, including us, blessing us with the gift of His body and blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins!

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your boundless love and mercy toward us. Amen.

“Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.” (Mark 14:10–11, ESV)

John’s Gospel tells us that it was specifically Judas Iscariot who objected to the costly gift of ointment that was poured on Jesus’ head. He was indignant not because he cared about the poor but because he cared about money, so much so that he would steal from their moneybag. After this Judas went to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus to them for the sum of thirty pieces of silver. (John 12)

It’s for good reason that the Scriptures warn against the temptations that arise with money. “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” said Jesus (Mark 10:23). And Paul wrote these well-known words to Timothy, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” (1 Timothy 6:10) Let us take heed to the warning given in Judas’s example, for whom the love of money led him to betray the Son of God, plunging him into eternal ruin and destruction.

Instead, let us follow the example of the woman at Bethany, who was glad to use her material wealth to confess her faith and show her love for her Lord Jesus. Because she had been forgiven much, she loved much, and she showed how deeply she treasured that forgiveness by giving Jesus a very costly gift in thanksgiving. We too have been forgiven much through the gift of the Lord’s Supper and the other means of grace. When we use our earthly wealth to purchase and maintain costly items for use in the Divine Service, such as communion vessels of precious metal or fine wood or crystal, we are confessing our faith and love for Jesus and how highly we value the boundless riches of his heavenly grace. The same is true when we support and provide for the men that God sends to administer the Sacrament among us.

O Christ, grant that we would always lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, which You have won for us by Your death on the cross. Amen.

“And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:25–27, ESV)

In the post-communion collect we pray that God would strengthen us through this salutary gift in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ not only forgives our sins, it also strengthens us to bear fruits of love and good works in our lives. Nevertheless, we remain sinners, even after communing.

We see this in the events following the institution of the Sacrament. After the disciples received it, they argued as to which of them should be considered the greatest, Peter denied his Lord, and the rest of the disciples abandoned Him.

Similarly, we go from the Divine Service forgiven, given life and salvation, and strengthened in faith toward God and in love toward our neighbors, yet we continue daily to sin much. This should not cause us to flee from the Sacrament but rather to flee to it, where we find Jesus with His grace and mercy. As our Lutheran Confessions quote Ambrose: “Because I always sin, I always need to take the medicine.” (Augsburg Confession XXIV:33)

Jesus doesn’t intend His Supper to be a rare event in the lives of His Christians. He wills that we do this often in remembrance of Him. That is, we are to eat and drink His Body and Blood under the bread and wine in faith, remembering His benefits and realizing that they are truly offered to us in this Sacrament. For by it our sins are forgiven, our faith and love are strengthened, and we are preserved in body and soul unto life everlasting.

Heavenly Father, grant us to seek Your mercy in those means which Your Son instituted for our benefit, that we might live as Your children now and forever. Amen.

“And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you,’” (Matthew 26:27, ESV)

THE CUP

We read in the Words of Institution from Matthew’s Gospel, **“And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you.’”** These are some of the clearest words in all the Scriptures. When Jesus established His Supper, He took a cup and instructed His disciples to drink from it. He wanted them to share. Not only did Jesus intend to give us communion with Himself in this Supper, but this is another example of how Jesus wants us to have communion with one another. The sharing of the cup has to do with this.

Sharing the cup is a good thing. It is how Jesus instituted this Supper. Luther said in his Large Catechism, “We must never think of the Sacrament as something harmful from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy that grants salvation and comfort...Why, then, do we act as if the Sacrament were a poison, the eating of which would bring death?” (LC V, 68). Luther’s words are instructive to us all. When we remember that this Supper is Jesus’ gift, in no way can it be harmful to us.

When men and women go carousing at parties and bars or attend celebrations, it isn’t uncommon to see them sharing from their drinks. They might share a taste with their neighbor, and not a fear enters their mind about germs or sickness. Their merriness blocks out any fear. As God’s people who have been united in His own family, how much more should we not be afraid of one another?! When we come together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we should not lose sight of the celebration which is taking place. As we go to the altar repenting of our sin and seeking forgiveness, we also are participating in great celebration and joy with our fellow believers. There is no room for fear, and so sharing the cup is something we can do joyfully.

One cup isn’t just a symbol of the unity we have in Christ. It helps establish unity as together we receive His forgiveness, celebrate His redemption for us, and go back into this world in peace and harmony with one another.

Lord Jesus, grant us to receive Your blood faithfully alongside our fellow members in the joyous feast of Your Supper. Amen.



Exorcism of the Mute Demon (Luke 11)

Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 11:14–28

“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!’” (Luke 11:27–28, ESV)

This exchange took place right after Jesus had cast out a demon. The people marveled in two ways. On one hand you had those who had seen the spectacle and their spirits were kindled into curiosity to what power and might could have the authority to cast out demons. On the other hand, you have those heretics and scoundrels that mocked the Christ. Christ silences them all by directing them back to his Father: “but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Some 2023 years later, we are onlookers into this scene. We are to learn from it who Christ is and what he has come to do. This is given to us in God’s Word. There are many mockers of our faith, especially our Lutheran faith, who despise God’s Word or teach falsely against it. Perhaps, they don’t confess that Jesus’ power is that really of the Devil, but through so many words and platitudes we are tempted to place our faith in someone or something other than Christ and His Word.

Thus, we turn to these words again, “blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” In them we are given the promise that God’s word brings salvation in the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us from the curse of sin, death, and the power of the Devil. And in that same power, He has given us the Sword of the Spirit that fights and never returns empty. We cling to God’s Word because we cling to the Gospel, and if we cling to His Word, we will cling to Christ.

Father in heaven, continue to defend us against all error and false teachings; bless those who preach, teach, and learn from Your saving Word that we, too, may be blessed in Your kingdom. Amen.

“He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful.” (Psalm 111:4, ESV)

There is true religion and there is false religion. A false religion takes the “fear, love, and trust” and places it in the laps of human beings. A false religion always leads back to inner megalomaniac that resides in our sinful selves that seeks to make something, anything, our god. None the less, a false religion is always a mockery of the faith in the one true God.

In contrast to the false religions in the world, the Psalm begs to ask, “who’s your god?” The Psalmist calls to mind the works of God in His acts towards His church and creation! In a world that would tempt us to sink into the abyss of selfishness, self-love, and egotism, we are led by the Psalmist to view God rightly.

Who is your God? His works are faithful and just. He provides for all who fear Him. He sent redemption to His people. Especially, He is gracious and merciful. His gifts are overflowing towards you every day. Your God has loved you so greatly that He sent his son, Jesus, who became man for you, lead you out of the wilderness of sin, and died for you on the cross. No other “god” can do this. No other god of our own devising nor from the cleverest man on earth can show this kind of grace and mercy.

Thus, we confess with the Psalmist, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. To say that all Christians who practice the true fear, love, and trust, in our God have a good understanding is to remember Christ’s benefits and receive them by faith, so that through them, we may made alive (Ap. XXIV.72).

Gracious and merciful God, You have called us out of darkness and into the great light; You give us all we need for our daily lives as well as our eternal life. Grant that we may ever hold Your wisdom before our eyes and learn Christ rightly. Amen.

“All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.” (Exodus 12:50–51, ESV)

God intended the Passover to be enjoyed by His people. He did not give to the Egyptians, Babylonians, nor to the heathens of the world. He gave it as a testimony of what He did when he saved them from the hand of Pharaoh. He gave it to them so that the people may remember the promises that He made and fulfilled. He gave it to them so that they knew that God was with them and saving them. God gave the Passover for His congregation.

It was expected that to be prepared for the Lord’s supper, one had to submit to the covenant of Israel (that is, be circumcised and made clean). In other words, there was a sense of partaking in the Passover rightly for its benefit. This is not strange to the New Testament church. We, too, confess that we are to examine ourselves before partaking. We, too, repent of our sins and desire Christ’s absolution. We, too, are called to believe in the bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine. We, too, are called into this assembly to consume the benefits of this eating and drinking. (1 Cor. 10 & 11)

The Lord’s Supper is given to us, sinners. When we eat and drink we proclaim Christ’s death until He comes. God gave these for our benefit. In it we have the promises of the Word, especially the forgiveness of sins. The Lord’s Supper is given to us while we traverse this earthly wilderness waiting for when Christ will pass over one more time and call His congregation into the final banquet room of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. God gave this Supper to His congregation, His communion of saints, His beloved children of the covenant in Christ. With this cup and this bread, the old is completed in Christ and the new is given to us.

Father, teach us to receive Your Son’s Holy Supper as He has instituted with all reverence and humility. Amen.

“And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”” (Mark 14:24–25, ESV)

Christ points to at least two things in these statements from Mark 14. First, in Mark’s account, Jesus establishes his Supper as the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. That Christ established this eating and drinking on the foundation of the promises that were given to the church. Namely that Christ is the Lord of the Supper who gives Himself as though a lamb led to slaughter.

The second, is that in that slaughtering, the gifts of the atonement are within this Supper. Jesus gives us His true body and blood in this sacrament. Just as the physical and bodily Jesus was thrust upon the cross, so too does he come in the flesh and blood in this supper. If Christ is giving Himself to us, then He is giving us also the forgiveness of our sins. It is Jesus’ blood that establishes this covenant. It’s sealed with Christ.

Thus, from these statements alone we can learn to look at the sacrament with all expectation of joy and a consoled conscience. When we take, eat, and drink we are consuming Christ’s body and blood for our forgiveness. We eat and drink, not as ones condemned, but as Christians that have this feast as a testimony of God’s will towards us. That He is so abundant in mercy that He would even give His grace in this supper.

Lord Jesus Christ, may Your true body and blood nourish us in body and soul until we take part of the feast to come on the last day where, at last, You will join us again in perfection. Amen.

“And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
(Hebrews 10:10, ESV)

The whole question of the benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar is answered clearly in a few words: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Luther’s Catechism makes this point very clear and without compromise. And nor should we. This is what we must hold dear ever before in our hearts and minds that would have us stray from these simple truths. What is at stake?

Otherwise, the devil may tempt you to despise God’s gifts, to steer you away from where God has said true life can be found and deceive you with so many other petty lies. It would be as though the devil himself would lead you to find the Supper as a trifling thing because it is such a meager feast, how can God ever make such a simple bread and a modest wine ever something so special?

That is why we must answer that in this Supper we have the testimony that there is no other sacrifice for our sins than the death of our savior Jesus Christ! In the Supper we have the forgiveness of sins that Christ had purchased for us through the payment of His body and blood. Now, we are given that redemption bread and wine, body and blood. We believe that this wonderful Supper was given to us so that we can use the Sacrament to remember all these benefits of forgiveness, life, and salvation which we receive through only Jesus Christ. To partake in the Supper is to recall Christ’s sacrifice and to remember His benefits given to us.

Gracious Father, preserve us by Your Holy Spirit in the faith that ever looks to Jesus Christ as the giver of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the Holy Supper. Keep us in this one true faith and kindle in us zeal for the benefits that Christ gives. Amen.

“for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
(Matthew 26:28, ESV)

Once there was a young man and his pastor in a Catechism Class. The pastor walked in briskly and asked, what is the benefit of the Lord’s Supper? The students replied with all sorts of “half correct” answers. Finally, the pastor sat down slowly, commanded the frustrated pupils to open their Bibles to the Words of Institution. There was palatable tension amongst the class as they read the words slowly until they came to read “for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus invites us to come to this meal. He wills it. He commands it. What is the benefit of this eating and drinking, you ask, then it is best to ask the master of the feast. His answer, “for the forgiveness of sins.” On one hand, it is a very easy answer, on the other hand, there is more to those few words than the pages of books could tell.

Why should you receive the benefits from the Lord’s Supper? Because Jesus commands you to: “take eat, take drink.” Because we need the gift of forgiveness for our sins. We sin daily and much. We are harassed by the devil day in and day out. Our weak flesh conquers over our feeble will and leaves us begging for some mercy from God.

What benefits are from the Lord’s supper? Mercy. Christ has given himself completely to us. He bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to all sins and live to righteousness with Him (1 Pe. 2:24). Where Christ gives Himself, there is His true body and blood. Where there is His true body and blood, there is the forgiveness of sins. Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is true life in Christ. Where there is true life in Christ, there is our God—saving us.

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the true bread of heaven that has promised us true life and mercy. Grant that we may eat this bread and drink this cup to our eternal benefit even the forgiveness of our sins which You won for us on Your cross. Amen.

“*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,”* (Matthew 26:27, ESV)

INTINCTION

If a Christian congregation is using the cup as Jesus first celebrated His Supper with his disciples, some congregations may happen to practice *intinction*. Intinction is the practice of slightly dipping the host (the bread, Christ’s body) in the cup, thereby receiving the blood of Christ when eating the host.

Intinction is a poor practice for two main reasons. First and most of all, it is contrary to Jesus’ instructions. Jesus said, “**Drink of it, all of you.**” Intinction is not drinking. It breaks the order and command of Jesus. Already it is a violation of Jesus’ institution. Second of all, it is not so sanitary as people assume. Folks who may want to dip the host may think are preventing the spread of germs by not putting their mouth to the cup, but it is the fingers themselves which are most notorious for spreading germs. We should know this, given all the admonitions our parents, teachers, and the medical establishment gives us to wash our hands. To dip the fingers into the cup is just not a good idea for sanitary reasons. We shouldn’t be surprised that a manmade way that doesn’t follow our Lord’s instructions is worse even on an earthly level. There’s simply no better way to do it than how Jesus instructed us.

If you are experiencing visible cold symptoms and think you would scandalize others by putting your mouth to the cup, it is fine to refrain from the Sacrament a time or two until you are feeling better. You could also arrange with the pastor to receive the blood of Christ by the cup as the last communicant that day. These would be better options than doing something which Jesus never instructed.

So we drink. Some Christians may feel they are showing reverence for the Sacrament by taking a tiny sip, taking as little from the cup as possible. That is up to Christian freedom, but don’t be afraid to take a good drink. It was what Jesus instructed. He gave it to be a cup of blessing, and we want to confess the truth and value of this Sacrament by being as faithful to Jesus’ words as we can.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to faithfully follow Your Word. Help our pastors to administer Your Sacraments faithfully in accordance with Your institution. Amen.



Feeding the 5,000 (John 6)

“Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” (John 6:4, ESV)

This short sentence is easy to miss in the wider text of John 6. It's a detail only given in John's account of the feeding of the 5000. It's an important detail to catch. The Passover is the main even in Old Testament salvation history. The tenth plague of Egypt would see the death of the firstborn of every household. Yet the Lord spared the life of the firstborn of Israel who had the blood of the lamb on their door. The Passover lamb took the place of the firstborn. In the same way, the only begotten Son of God takes our place and dies.

Jesus had gone away with His disciples and they were in a desolate place (Matthew 14:15). The crowd that had followed Jesus had seen the signs that he was doing on the sick (John 6:2). The Lord has compassion on them and teaches them (Mark 6:34). They feasted on God's Word that came from Jesus' mouth (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 5:2). Like the bread of the Passover was to be made without yeast, Jesus' words are without yeast. His Words are pure and without blemish. His Word is a feast to the ears that give life.

Jesus, born in Bethlehem (House of Bread), has compassion on them and teaches them, feeding them with His Word. Evening comes and the crowd is without bread to eat. Jesus feeds them. In words very reminiscent of the words He uses in the Upper Room, Jesus takes the bread and fish and feeds five thousand households.

As I like to say at all the major holy days of the Church (Christmas, Easter, etc...), “first we feast, then we eat.” We feast on the Word of God in sermon and song and the body and blood of Jesus. Then we go to our homes and eat the fruits of the earth.

O Jesus, bread of life, help us to always hear Your Word rightly and feast upon what You give to us through faith alone. Amen.

“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” (Psalm 34:11, ESV)

Children learn to speak by listening and repeating back what they hear. Most often a child’s first words are “mama” or “dada.” It isn’t long after that and they pick up words and phrases at a rapid pace. Adults are no different. We read, hear, and see and it’s absorbed by us and we repeat it back.

In the Biblical sense, this is called “confession.” In the New Testament the word for confession is ὁμολογέω (homologeō) or “to say the same.” We hear God’s Word and repeat it back to Him. We do this in three ways: confession of sin (Mark 1:5), confession of faith (Romans 10:9), and confession of praise (Luke 2:38). We’re most familiar with the first two (sin and faith) as it happens in the Divine Service. The third use isn’t as well known, confession of praise, but it too happens in the Divine Service. We hear and repeat back to God what He has said to us. What has God done for our salvation? What mighty deeds has He performed to bring about our redemption? Repeating the history of salvation back to God and to one another is our confession of praise (see Psalm 118:17).

This happens each time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. We hear: “Our Lord Jesus Christ on *the night when He was betrayed*...” It’s Holy Thursday again and we hear the Word of Jesus giving us His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. As the voice from heaven said at the Transfiguration, “listen to Him” (Matthew 17:5). Listen. What does Jesus say of the bread and wine? It is His body and blood “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” *Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: “forgiveness of sins.”*

Lord, show us still that Thou art good And grant us evermore this food. Give faith to ev’ry wav’ring soul And make each wounded spirit whole (TLH 304:6). Amen.

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’ ”” (Exodus 16:11–12, ESV)

Hunger is a wonderful ingredient. It makes a bland meal taste good. It makes the hungry savor each bite. The people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness and they grumbled, longing for the meat pots and bread of Egypt. Their aching bellies made them forget the harshness of slavery that they endured for 400 years. And God feeds them with quail each evening and with manna each morning.

Before Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and other holy days and celebrations, there is always food to prepare. If those meals look like a Norman Rockwell painting or National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation, we look forward to the food either way! Even with the stress and anxiety that so easily come with such celebrations and preparations, there’s always the food to look forward to. In the midst of the Lenten fast, that Easter dinner can sound pretty appealing. Your grumbling tummy longs for a feast.

God your Father hears your grumbling, not just of your tummy, but your grumbling against your neighbor. He hears the mumbling under your breath. He hears your groans under the weight of sin (Romans 8:22; Hebrews 12:1). There is a place of rest for you. There is a feast prepared for you. There’s always the food. Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51). He gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of sin.

Hunger is a wonderful ingredient. Hunger for the feast that is set before you on the altar. Feast at His table that He prepares before you. There is the comfort, the rest, and the good news of forgiveness, hope, and joy.

Lord Jesus, bread of life who came down from heaven, draw us to Your altar that we would hear and believe and receive the forgiveness of all our sin. Amen.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”
(1 Corinthians 11:26, ESV)

If you don’t take the medicine, it won’t help you. You can fill the prescription but if you never take it, it won’t help.

Likewise, you can hear the words of Jesus, *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*...but if you don’t believe them or do what they say, they’re of no benefit to you. Nobody likes to be told that they need help. Deny it all you want but you’ll still be stuck on the roof until someone comes to help and hold the ladder. Deny it all you want but you’ll still be stuck in the quagmire of sin and floundering away cursing into the wind. You need help.

The word of Jesus and the eating and drinking are the main thing in the Sacrament. Jesus helps us through our hearing the Words, believing them, and then eating and drinking in the Sacrament. To eat and drink without faith in His Words is to drink judgment upon yourself. The Sacrament is meant to be a help for us because we need it.

You need help. Hear the words of Jesus, your great physician, believe them, and eat and drink the medicine He offers. The Augsburg Confession states: *Therefore, the Mass is to be used for administering the Sacrament to those that need consolation. [St.] Ambrose says, “Because I always sin, I always need to take the medicine”* (AC XXIV:33).

And what help do you receive from eating His body and drinking His blood? Exactly what He says: forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness isn’t some visceral or instinctive feeling that is left to the imagination. Jesus makes forgiveness something bodily, tangible, and external from you. Like a sinus infection is treated with medicine, something physical brings healing. Jesus gives you far greater, His body and blood for you to eat and drink given and shed for you. You hear that word and promise and believe it. You take the bread and eat it. You take the cup and drink it. You proclaim His death until He comes.

Lord Jesus, help us, have mercy on us, and save us poor sinners. Amen.

“But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8, ESV)

This passage in Matthew is a great example of faith. The centurion uses his life as the example and confesses his faith in Jesus. A soldier is told to do this and he must do it. The servant is told by the master to do that, and it is to be done. The commander or master gives the order and the deed is done by those given to do it. The word is given, and it happens.

The centurion asks Jesus to, “say the word, and my servant will be healed.” He confesses that he isn’t worthy have Jesus come under his roof and knows that simply by giving the word it will happen. Jesus marvels at this man’s faith (Matthew 8:10). That’s all it takes. The word is given, and it happens. “And the servant was healed at that very moment” (Matthew 8:13).

God speaks and creation comes into existence. What word is there for today? What word of hope and grace? What word of forgiveness, healing, and life? “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament.

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and death came into the world. Jesus gives His body and blood, the fruits of His tree, the cross, and we are given life. Jesus gives the Word and it is so. His body and blood are hidden under the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink. *In consecrated wine and bread No eye perceives the myst'ry dread; But Jesus' words are strong and clear: “My body and My blood are here.” (TLH 304:3).* That’s all it takes. The word is given, and it happens.

Lord Jesus, we are not worthy to have you come under the roof of our mouths, but only say the word, and we will be healed. Grant us faith in Your Word, especially concerning Your Supper. Amen.

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:54, ESV)

Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures. God told Ezekiel, “Eat this scroll” (Ezekiel 3:1-3). Jesus tells us to do that. How do you do it? Through hearing and believing the Word of God as it is read and preached to you. The Scriptures read in your home at the family altar, at the dining room table (where you eat!).

The word for “feeds” is τρώγω (trogo) in John 6:54 and means to gnaw, munch, or chew (also used in John 6:56, 57, & 58). Gnawing on the flesh of Jesus and drinking His blood, sounds like to “inwardly digesting.”

The Formula of Concord states: *“There is a two-fold eating of Christ’s flesh. One is spiritual, which Christ describes especially in John 6:54. This ‘eating’ happens in no other way than with the Spirit and faith, in preaching and meditation on the Gospel, as well as in the Lord’s Supper”* (Solid Declaration VII:61).

Christians feast on the Word of God, both as it is read and preached and given into our mouths to eat and drink. Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14) and He is the Lamb of God (John 1:29). He is the Lamb that God would provide for Himself for a burnt offering (Genesis 22:8). He is the Passover Lamb without blemish (Exodus 12:5) whose blood now marks our door.

Luther wrote: *“Here is the true Paschal Lamb Which God Himself attested. That was on the tree of shame In flaming passion roasted His blood on our doorpost lies; Faith holds that before Death’s eyes; the smiting angel can do nought”* (Luther’s Works 53:257).

We all must eat. Feast on the Word of God that sounds forth from the table of the Lord. Eat this scroll; read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it and make it a part of who you are. Remember the old cliché: you are what you eat.

O Christ Jesus, may we feast on You by faith at pulpit and altar and by this eating and drinking receive the salvation of our bodies and souls. Amen.

“I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:29, ESV)

GRAPE JUICE; COMMUNION IN BOTH KINDS

Jesus told His disciples, **“I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29).** The fruit of the vine is wine. Unfermented grape juice was not invented until the 19th century. The disciples could not have known about it, and they would never have celebrated the Lord’s Supper with such a thing.

It is therefore a poor practice to use grape juice to celebrate the Lord’s Supper instead of wine. Such is usually tried when attempting to accommodate men and women who have a history of alcohol abuse. Such a mentality may think it is well-meaning, but it seeks to improve upon what our Lord Jesus has commanded. This is dangerous territory for the Christian. You cannot be more compassionate than the Lord Jesus Himself. Following His institution from the Bible cannot hurt people. Such a mindset of improving upon what Jesus has given corrupts the good gifts which God has given and can even end in the persecution of faithful Christians.

Even so our churches maintain what we call the Holy Communion in “both kinds.” All communicants are to receive the bread and the cup, because that is what Jesus established. To remove one part is to undermine the mystery of the Supper and deprive the Christian. Bread and wine – these are required in the Sacrament.

An old Lutheran meditation on the Holy Communion states, “Dearest Savior, You took bread and wine for this purpose, and by them wished to indicate the powerful working of this Sacrament, that, just as bread strengthens the body of man, and wine gladdens our hearts, so in the Holy Supper my weary and troubled soul is to receive new strength and be gloriously refreshed.” Know that Jesus chose bread and wine for a reason, and He desires to bless you through these things.

Asserting these truths is not to say that we are insensitive to folks who have allergy or a history of abuse. Faithful pastors and godly Christians will find a way to be faithful to our Lord’s institution, so long as the Lord Jesus is our guide.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to forsake any alterations or attempts improve upon Your Word. Help us to believe that what You have instituted is best for us and for all Christians. Amen.



Jesus threatened with stoning (John 8)

“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’” (John 8:47, 51–52, ESV)

This final week means we will be taking up the topic of worthiness for receiving the Lord’s Supper. We learn from the Small Catechism that faith in the Words of Jesus make for worthiness. This Sunday’s Gospel lesson summarizes this faith by using the words “hear” and “keep”.

Our fathers in the faith often call the Lord’s Supper the medicine of immortality. Really, the same can be said of the Word of God – for the Word of God brings eternal life. Here, in this text we see the example of unfaithfulness towards the Word of God in the Jews who were listening to Jesus preach that day. They do not hear what He says. They cannot even quote Him properly. Instead, they are just angry at Christ and looking for ways to malign Him and His teaching. They blaspheme God and bring every curse upon themselves. They lose out on the Words of everlasting life that Jesus was teaching.

The faithful hearing or keeping of Christ’s Word brings life. This is very applicable to our worthy reception of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus tells us what this Sacrament is. We either believe it for our lives, or don’t believe it for our continued death. It is meant to be an absolute blessing for us. That’s why Christ instituted it.

When you hear the Words of Institution today, keep them. Believe them. This is how Christ will bless you with the medicine of immortality in the supper today and each time you commune.

Lord Jesus, grant us faith by Your Holy Spirit to believe Your holy Word and keep it, that we may never see death but inherit eternal life. Amen.

“He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! Selah” (Psalm 50:4–6, ESV)

The Psalm speaks of judgment. By what standard is God to judge? God judges based upon faith in Christ. That is so simple and yet profound.

The faithful ones are the ones that God wants to gather. Gathering is a built-in habit for those who believe in Jesus and belong to His Church. They have been called out of the world and into His Kingdom the Church. They gather where He can be found in His grace and mercy – around the preached Word and the rightly administered Sacraments. This is because the faithful regard God’s Word as truth and lend their “amen” to it. They are the ones who trust in not their own righteousness, but the righteousness of God – the righteousness of Christ which becomes the possession of the faithful.

We Lutherans often prefer to use the word “testament” rather than “covenant”. They are the same word in the Greek. Testament emphasizes the one-way direction of the work of God in Christ Jesus for our sake. If covenant is to be used, we have to consider Christ to be the One who acts on our behalf, fulfilling our part of the covenant with God. This is in line with how we have righteousness as well. Both testament and covenant mean a death is to be died. Either word that we use, the death is that of Christ, and we receive all the benefit of Christ’s death by believing in Him. This is especially true in our reception of the Lord’s Supper.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to believe in You and place our trust in Your Word and work for our sake. Help us to faithfully gather when Your Word and Sacrament are offered to us. Amen.

“So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” (John 6:53–56, ESV)

The Small Catechism teaches that bodily eating and drinking Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper is the main thing in the Sacrament, along with the words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus commanded that we orally eat and drink the real bread and wine that He declares to be His true body and blood. But this bodily eating is not the only kind of eating, and it alone does not make us worthy to receive the Sacrament rightly. In fact, without the other kind of eating, the Lord’s Supper is not only not helpful, but is even harmful to us, as the Scripture testifies (1 Corinthians 11:27).

In order to eat and drink the Sacrament bodily for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and not for judgment, one must also eat and drink Christ’s flesh and blood spiritually, as Jesus told the Jews in John 6. This is nothing other than faith, which Jesus commanded when He said, “This do in remembrance of Me.” When we believe the Word of the Lord, that His body and blood are truly given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins, and then in faith eat the bread that is His Body and drink the wine that is His Blood, then we can be certain that our sins are surely forgiven us and that we will live with Christ forever.

Lord Jesus, Your Word is truth. Grant that we always might partake of Your holy Body and precious Blood spiritually through faith and bodily in the Lord’s Supper. Amen.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Corinthians 11:27–30, ESV)

The Word of the Lord is always true. When Jesus said, “Take, eat; this is My Body,” and “Drink of it, all of you, this is My Blood,” He meant it. In the Lord’s Supper the bread is truly His Body and the wine is truly His blood. They are so not because of the faith of the pastor or the faith of the communicant, but because of the Word of Jesus. That means that all who come to the altar and eat the bread and drink the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper eat and drink Jesus’ Body and Blood. Both those who are godly, pious, believing Christians and those who are unworthy, godless hypocrites receive what Jesus has declared to be present: His Body and Blood.

However, those who eat and drink His Body and Blood in doubt and disbelief are unworthy to receive the Sacrament, and the results are far worse than being ineffective or neutral. The Bible says that those who are unworthy are guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord and eat and drink judgment on themselves. This guilt and judgment has real bodily effects: weakness, illness, even death.

“Let a person examine himself, then,” writes St. Paul, “and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” It is proper therefore that we always prepare ourselves to receive the Sacrament, first by recognizing our sins and need for forgiveness in repentance, and then by faith, trusting in the command and promise of Christ our Lord, which never fails.

O God, preserve us from an unworthy reception of Your Son’s Sacrament through sincere repentance and true faith in His Words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Amen.

“Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.” (Isaiah 58:3, ESV)

If fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training, then what are we to make of God’s words through the prophet Isaiah? The people of Israel fasted. They humbled themselves. They went without. Why does their fasting not please God?

The fasting of the people in Isaiah’s day was not fine outward training. It was merely outward training. Their hearts were not right. They fasted with their bodies, but sought their own pleasure. They fasted but fought with their hearts. They spread ash on their heads and covered their bodies with sackcloth, and yet all of this was just sanctimonious hypocrisy. This MERELY outward training does not please God.

What fast does God choose? This chosen fast is the fast from wickedness, from deceit, and from other sins. The fasting which God chooses also shares bread with the hungry. The fasting which pleasing God gives comfort to the oppressed and expresses charity. In short, the fasting which God chooses is the fast which is done in faith.

The fast which God chooses is fasting done in faith. This pleases God and He gives great rewards out of His abundant grace. He promises to strengthen us in our bodies, grant us our desire, and guide us continually. It is a wonder, but it is true. God rewards us out of His grace, without any merit or worthiness in us.

The fasting God chooses is faith working in love. This is what fine outward training is. Faith alone justifies, but faith is never alone. Faith loves because we were first loved by Christ. Faith toward God, and fervent love toward one another. If we fast, let us fast in faith and love.

Heavenly Father, through the prophet Isaiah You condemned mere outward fasting and told us that the fasting You choose is fasting which is done in faith and is worked out in love. Strengthen our faith so that we might show charity and mercy to all, as You have to us in Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

“And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God,” (Ezra 9:5, ESV)

The world is terrible; it's true. We look on the news and we see great horror and evil. It hurts, there's no doubt about that. But it really hurts when we see the church, God's holy people, beleaguered and oppressed by inward sin. To see the holy people of God besmirched with sin is worse. To see holy husbands unequally yoked with unbelieving women is worse. To see the faithlessness of the church's servants is worse.

What is the world's reaction? *“Tho' with a scornful wonder/ the world sees her oppressed,/ by schisms rent asunder,/ by heresies distressed”* (LSB 644:3). The world scorns the church. The world makes fun of the church's warts and blemishes. And God's name is blasphemed thereby. But we are not the world. We are in the world, but not of it. Our reaction should be different.

What should our reaction be? Ezra gives us an example of how we should react. We fast because of our great grief. And then, we pray. We pray to God, Who made the church holy and can again renew her. We pray that His kingdom come, so that those who have fallen rise once more. We pray that His good and gracious will be done, not our evil, sinful desire.

And we pray, knowing God answers it. This is one of the reasons we pray the Lord's prayer before the Lord's Supper. We pray what Christ has taught us to ask for, and then God graciously gives it to us. His name is hallowed when we take the Lord's Supper. His kingdom comes among us. His will is done in the Lord's Supper. And that good and gracious will is that we are forgiven through Jesus' blood and merit.

Fast and pray before the Lord's Supper. Know that the evil in the church has been overcome by Christ, Who graciously gives us His Supper.

Lord Jesus, help us not to despair, but to go to Your supper, knowing that there You answer our prayer. Amen.

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28, ESV)

INFANT COMMUNION

Now and again some Lutherans contend that we should give the Lord’s Supper to infants. Are they not children of God? Did not Jesus give his body and blood for them too? Should they not participate in the fullness of congregational life? That is usually how the rhetoric is presented.

St. Paul wrote, **“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28)**. For this reason, we teach that communicants should examine themselves before going to the Lord’s Supper. They should consider their lives in light of the entire Christian doctrine: what sin is, what Jesus has done for them, and what He gives them in His holy sacraments. Since infants do not examine themselves this way, they are not admitted to the Sacrament.

Proponents of infant communion are not persuaded by this argument. They would say that Paul’s words only apply to adults and that infants should be admitted to the Sacrament anyway. Therefore, it is helpful to know what our Lutheran Confessions say also. The Large Catechism says, “For it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know what they seek or why they come” (LC V, 2). The Augsburg Confession states, “No one is admitted to the Sacrament without first being examined” (AC XXIV, 6). Such statements from the Lutheran Confessions would preclude infants from coming to the Supper. We have an obligation to teach them why Jesus instituted this Sacrament before they come. An absence of this teaching would be spiritual negligence.

While the Evangelical Lutheran Church does not commune infants, it would also be a grave error for us to bind admission to the Sacrament to a fixed age. Luther said in his Large Catechism also, “Since the children are baptized and received into the Christian Church, they should also enjoy this communion of the Sacrament, in order that they may serve us and be useful to us” (LC V, 87). It is the responsibility of Christian parents then to work closely with their pastors, that their children receive Christian instruction and are admitted to the Lord’s Supper at the appropriate time.

Lord Jesus, help us to be faithful to Your Word and help our pastors to do the same. Amen.



Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21)

“They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” (Matthew 21:7–9, ESV)

The book of 1 Kings begins with Adonijah presuming to be aged King David’s successor. Nathan the prophet speaks to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon about the matter. They address David himself. By verse 32 in the first chapter we hear:

King David said, “Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.” So they came before the king. And the king said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel.

David established Solomon as king by having Solomon ride on David’s own mule. The priest and prophet are there alongside the new king. In Matthew 21, Jesus Christ, our prophet, priest, and king, is recognized as the royal son of David.

The royal banners forward go;
The cross shows forth redemption’s flow,
Where He, by whom our flesh was made,
Our ransom in His flesh has paid. (LSB 455: 1)

The cross is Christ’s throne where He is declared King of the Jews. There, fulfilling prophecy, Jesus shed His blood for you, “Himself the victim and Himself the priest” (LSB 637:1).

Almighty and everlasting God, in Your tender love towards humanity You sent Your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take on Himself our flesh and to suffer death on the cross. Grant that we may follow the example of His patience and humility, and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Anointing of Jesus (John 12)

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:27–33, ESV)

Lamb of God, pure and holy,
Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly,
Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us,
Else had despair reigned o’er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus! (LSB 434:1)

Jesus is both the priest and the sacrifice on the altar of the cross. There, He was lifted up. There, He draws all people to Himself. Crucifixion is the kind of death He knew He would receive so that we would receive life from Him.

Martin Luther reminds us clearly that the cross is where the forgiveness of sins was won, but the cross is not where the forgiveness of sins is delivered. We go to where Christ has promised to deliver His forgiveness according to His promises. We hear the Word of Gospel. We receive Holy Baptism. We hear the word of Absolution. We receive His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. The passion of Christ means peace for us in Christ.

Almighty God, we fail in so many adversities because of our weakness. Restore us by the Passion and intercession of Your only Son; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Jesus finds the disciples asleep (Mark 14)

“It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.’”

“Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.” (Mark 14:1-2, 10–11, ESV)

Was Judas one of those who complained? A woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, broke the flask and poured it over Jesus’ head, said to themselves indignantly, **“Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.”** Judas’ objection could explain him going to the chief priests, and the chief priests changing their mind to not arrest and kill Him during the feast.

Jesus said, **“Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me.”**

Your soul in griefs unbounded,

Your head with thorns surrounded,

You died to ransom me.

The cross for me enduring,

The crown for me securing,

You healed my wounds and set me free. (*LSB* 453:5)

The baptized are given to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, including valuable ointment, an expensive anointing, allegedly worth three hundred days of labor. Honoring Jesus is no waste. It is worship.

Almighty and eternal God, grant that we may celebrate the mysteries of our Lord’s Passion and find there the pardon of our sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Judas agrees to betray Jesus (Luke 22)

“For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:27–30, ESV)

Jesus words in Luke 22:30 anticipate His institution of the Sacrament of the Altar by prophesying about the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His kingdom that has no end. Jesus serves us from the cross:

See, from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown? (*LSB* 425/6: 3)

Jesus serves us in the Sacrament of the Altar. He gives us His own Body to eat along with “The bread that we break” and His own Blood to drink from “the cup of blessing that we bless” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Jesus is among us as the One who serves. He is the Host and He is Himself the Meal. We know of Him as the Good Shepherd from John 10 and Psalm 23. That precious psalm addresses our comfort in dark, evil times, and also when we need freed from our sins and the guilt over past sins:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Almighty God, we are continually afflicted by our evil deeds. Free us by the Passion of Your only Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The Lord's Supper from a 1558 Book of Luther's Sermons

“He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.’” (John 13:6–8, ESV)

This is the night in which He was betrayed. Before Peter denied Him, he resisted what Jesus would do to him and for him. That is spiritually dangerous, especially after Jesus just said, **“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”**

Peter’s denials come in John 18. The rooster predicted in John 13:38 crows in John 18:27.

Jesus had said, “...afterward you will understand.” “Afterward” comes in John 21, especially verse 17: He [Jesus] said to him [Peter] the third time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, **“Do you love me?”** and he said to him, **“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”** Jesus said to him, **“Feed my sheep.”**

Peter was grieved because the threefold questions parallel his threefold denial. After the grief of repentance, Peter enjoys the fruits of his redemption in Christ Jesus.

O Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee,

In thanksgiving bow before Thee.

Thou with Thy body and Thy blood didst nourish

Our weak souls that they may flourish:

O Lord, have mercy!

May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary,

That our sins and sorrows did carry,

And Thy blood for us plead

In all trial, fear, and need:

O Lord, have mercy! (LSB 617:1)

We rejoice in the reconciliation Jesus gives us in the forgiveness of sins, especially delivered in the Sacrament of the Altar!

O Lord God, You have left to us in this wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Your Passion. Grant that we may use this Sacrament of Your body and blood so that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be shown in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The Crucifixion of Jesus By Lucas Cranach the Elder

“Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’ And again another Scripture says, ‘They will look on him whom they have pierced.’” (John 19:31–37, ESV)

Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,
Be for all the noblest tree;
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thine equal be;
Symbol of the world’s redemption,
For the weight that hung on thee! (LSB 454:4)

The weight of our sins was on the cross with Christ. Contrary to what some false teachers may claim, Christ committed no personal sins. He bore your sins there on the cross and died.

A scientific mind will hear “blood and water” and realize that Jesus had been dead long enough for the plasma and red blood cells to separate. Faith hears “blood and water” and thinks of “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), Holy Baptism, and the blood and body of the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27), Holy Communion. The weight of our sins is taken away.

Merciful and eternal God, You did not spare Your only Son but gave Him up for us all that He might bear our sins on the cross. Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we may not fear any trouble; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Crucifixion and Open Tomb

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2, ESV)

WHO IS TO ADMINISTER THE SUPPER

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He did it in the presence of His disciples. He gave them the bread and the cup and said, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** When He told His disciples to do this Supper in His remembrance, He gave His disciples charge to administer the Supper. This is why we do not celebrate the Lord’s Supper privately in our homes or choose people at random to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in our congregations. It was the disciples’ job to do this.

Even today we see our pastors as those men who succeed the disciples in this role. The pastoral office wasn’t the church’s invention which it arranged for its own convenience after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, but it was the institution of Jesus Himself for the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments. It is pastors who consecrate and administer the Lord’s Supper, just as it is the pastors who preach publicly and baptize. To usurp this authority is to undermine what Jesus gave us for our good.

Consecrating and distributing the Lord’s Supper – these are not hard tasks in themselves. They are actually quite easy. Why we want trained, called, and ordained men to this is because the *stewardship* of the Lord’s Supper can be quite difficult. St. Paul said, **“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”** (1 Corinthians 4:1). While chanting a few words and handling the elements is not difficult, the stewardship of these things requires discernment and great care. These are the mysteries of God. Pastors must admit and refuse communicants. They must admonish and comfort. They do these things all in accord with God’s Holy Word. These are not easy tasks, and so the church prepares ministers with great care.

We remember that while there is such thing as emergency Baptism, there is no such thing as an emergency Lord’s Supper. No one is at liberty to celebrate the Lord’s Supper on his own, no matter how easy it would be. For this we wait for God’s servants, whom He has sent to be a blessing for us.

Lord Jesus, help us to honor the gift of the pastoral ministry. Help our pastors be faithful stewards of all that You have given them to do in Your Church. Amen.



The Empty Tomb

The Resurrection of our Lord - Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8

And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." Mark 16:6-7

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Today we gather with our brothers and sisters in the faith, that is our closest family as eternity sees it, to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. Today we will also likely feast on sumptuous food and break the Lenten fast. Today is a great day for all Christians.

The angel says "just as He told you." Jesus said so, so He will make sure it happens just as He said. This is the same as when our Lord tells us anything in His Word, especially today as we hear of His resurrection (He said it would happen and it did). So also the Lord's words "This is my Body" and so forth in the Sacrament are words that come true, just as He says.

As we believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead, we also grasp by faith that our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, really is present in His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Supper. How? He said so. By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the Word of the Lord the Sacrament of the Altar is exactly what Jesus says.

So much of our faith is simply hearing what Jesus says, believing it, and confessing it. At the Transfiguration the Father's voice called from heaven with the command "Listen to Him". Now the angels say "just as He told you." Blessed are those who can simply say "amen" to our Lord's words. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for earning our forgiveness, being raised from the dead to confirm Your victory, and for allowing simple words to be the reason we have the Sacrament of the Altar which delivers that forgiveness to us. May we always believe them. Amen.



Christian Questions and their Answers

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Prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament [The “Christian Questions with Their Answers,” designating Luther as the author, first appeared in an edition of the Small Catechism in 1551, five years after Luther’s death].

After confession and instruction in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the pastor may ask, or Christians may ask themselves these questions:

1. *Do you believe that you are a sinner?*

Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner.

2. *How do you know this?*

From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.

3. *Are you sorry for your sins?*

Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.

4. *What have you deserved from God because of your sins?*

His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. See Romans 6:21,23.

5. *Do you hope to be saved?*

Yes, that is my hope.

6. *In whom then do you trust?*

In my dear Lord Jesus Christ.

7. *Who is Christ?*

The Son of God, true God and man.

8. *How many Gods are there?*

Only one, but there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

9. *What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?*

He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

10. *Did the Father also die for you?*

He did not. The Father is God only, as is the Holy Spirit; but the Son is both true God and true man. He died for me and shed his blood for me.

11. How do you know this?

From the holy Gospel, from the words instituting the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament.

12. What are the Words of Institution?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

13. Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?

Yes, I believe it.

14. What convinces you to believe this?

The word of Christ: Take, eat, this is My body; drink of it, all of you, this is My blood.

15. What should we do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and in this way receive His pledge?

We should remember and proclaim His death and the shedding of His blood, as He taught us: This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.

16. Why should we remember and proclaim His death?

First, so that we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only Christ, true God and man, could do that. Second, so we may learn to be horrified by our sins, and to regard them as very serious. Third, so we may find joy and comfort in Christ alone, and through faith in Him be saved.

17. What motivated Christ to die and make full payment for your sins?

His great love for His Father and for me and other sinners, as it is written in John 14; Romans 5; Galatians 2 and Ephesians 5.

18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?

That I may learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for my sin, and also learn from Him to love God and my neighbor.

19. What should admonish and encourage a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?

First, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord. Second, his own pressing need, because of which the command, encouragement, and promise are given.

20. But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first, he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5. Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2.

Note: These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and devout Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one pay attention and consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians in chapter six: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked."

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