

PMINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday after Easter, April 23, 2017

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

Hymns: 313, 207:6, 163:1-5, 288, 321:3-4.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Luke 22:14-20.

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:26-28.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we continue our study of the Lord's Supper, we must first be reminded of what the Sacrament of Holy Communion really is. We believe, teach, and confess in agreement with the Holy Scriptures that it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink. But this is no ordinary meal. Today let's begin by talking about what we are to do with the bread and the wine and the body and blood of Christ. Remember first, that it is in the eating and the drinking that we receive the body and blood of Christ, in, with, and under the bread and the wine.

What use are we to make of this sacrament? Christ gives us Christians his body and his blood to eat and to drink. We are not to adore it or worship it. We are not to place it on a pole and have a parade, as some do on the Festival Day of Corpus Christi. Christ certainly wants us to use his Supper, to eat and drink his body and blood under the bread and wine. There would be no Lord's Supper if pastor and congregation went through the entire Communion Liturgy, but no one ate and drank. It does not matter how much we eat and drink, just so we really eat and drink, and not merely moisten the lips. However, this Supper is not intended to satisfy bodily hunger and thirst. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about a meal that they had when they came together: ***"When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!"*** 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 (NIV) The meal they ate was certainly not the Lord's Supper. But as we continue our study of this sacrament, let's continue by talking about

THE BLESSINGS OF HOLY COMMUNION

- 1. What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking?**
- 2. How can eating and drinking do such great things?**

With Luther, who drew his Small Catechism from the Holy Scriptures, we ask the question 'What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking?' Pointing to the Word of God, we see that the blessing is shown us by these words: "Given" and "poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is of no benefit if we do not use it, if we do not eat and drink. When Christ tells us ***"do this in remembrance of me."*** 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 (NIV) he requires that this Sacrament should forever be administered in his church on earth and that we should especially remember and proclaim his death when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Scripture plainly says ***"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*** 1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV)

This command to eat and drink was addressed not to the general public, but to the disciples. And so this sacrament is "for us Christians to eat and to drink" When we do this in remembrance of Jesus, we should not

partake of this Supper thoughtlessly, but should believingly remember that Jesus gave his body and shed his blood for the remission of our sins.

We might want to ask: How can eating and drinking do such great things? Luther explains: It is certainly not the eating and drinking that does such things, but the words “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words are the main thing in this sacrament, along with the eating and drinking. And whoever believes these words has what they plainly say, that is, the forgiveness of sins.

When we **“proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”** 1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV), or, as the King James Version reads **“Show the Lord's death”**, we confess our faith in the redeeming death of our Lord, and remind others that Jesus died also for their sins.

Jesus plainly tells us of this sacrament: **“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** Matthew 26:28 (NIV)

What do the words, “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins,” “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins” tell us? These words tell us that in the Sacrament Christ gives to every communicant as a pledge of the remission of sins that same body and blood with which he earned the forgiveness of sins for us.

These words tell us that in the Sacrament Christ offers, gives and assures to every communicant forgiveness of all his sins, and as a seal and pledge of this offer he gives under the bread and wine the very body and blood with which he earned this forgiveness.

We must guard against using the Lord's Supper for some frivolous, superstitious, or blasphemous purpose. Nor must we regard our partaking of the Sacrament as a meritorious work, that is, a good deed by which we earn forgiveness for ourselves. But, like Baptism, the Lord's Supper is a means through which God himself offers, gives and assures grace and forgiveness to us. These blessings are offered to us not just in the bread and wine, nor in the body and blood of Christ, but together with these words "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins". The body and blood of Christ serve as a seal to make the promise more sure to us. Thus the Supper is indeed a means of grace, in which God deals with each communicant individually to assure him personally of the forgiveness of all his sins. Therefore we do not go to Communion to earn favor with God, but to receive from him blessings and benefits for ourselves.

Christians are commanded to preach the Gospel, to proclaim the message of salvation. That is done through words, which come into the human heart through hearing, or through the eyes which read those words. But in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper Jesus wisely includes all five of the human senses: hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste. We hear the Word of God in Jesus' words of institution. We see the bread and wine. We can smell the wine. We touch and taste the bread and wine with our tongues.

It is with the words of Christ that we are also assured that together with the forgiveness of sins, we receive also life and salvation.

And so we approach the Lord's Table to be assured of the forgiveness of our sins and thus to be strengthened in our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;

Forgiveness of sins is given us in the Sacrament not in the sense as though we did not have any before, because the Sacrament was instituted for Christians, and they have complete forgiveness the very moment they believe in Christ and as long as they continue in this faith. Besides this, forgiveness was announced and assured to them in Absolution, which commonly precedes Communion. Nor do we receive a new supply of forgiveness every time we go to Lord's Table; for remission of sins is not offered in parts and portions, as our daily bread is. We either have forgiveness for all sins, or we have none at all. Our faith in Christ grasps and perceives, holds and believes the forgiveness of all our sins. But in the Lord's Supper this full forgiveness is emphatically assured and confirmed to us personally, and thus our faith in this forgiveness is strengthened. And this is what we need. For because of our sins, which we daily commit, our faith weakens, and may finally die; and losing faith, we lose what we had by faith, namely the forgiveness of our sins. For this reason we should frequently go to the Sacrament.

Being assured of the grace of God, our hearts are filled with gratitude toward God, and our spiritual life is invigorated, which gives us strength and willingness to serve God in holy works, to do good to our neighbor, to avoid temptation, and to be patient in tribulation. It also strengthens us in our hope of eternal life. Such

encouragement and comfort we certainly need on our way through life. For all these reasons we should partake of the Sacrament frequently.

By partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament we enter into a very close and intimate communion also with those who partake of the Supper with us, and also demonstrate that unity of the Spirit, of which Scripture speaks.

Luther asks: How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking indeed that does them, but the words written here, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins"; which words, besides the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he who believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

It is not the eating and drinking indeed that imparts the forgiveness of sins. All communicants, worthy and unworthy, eat and drink together with the bread and wine also the body and blood of Christ. If, then, the mere eating and drinking imparted these great blessings, also the unworthy would receive them, which is not the case, for we learn that the unworthy communicant becomes guilty of a sin with respect to the body and blood of Christ.

By his words "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins" Christ has placed the forgiveness of sins into the Sacrament, and there he offers, gives, and seals it to all believing communicants. These words, therefore, are the chief thing in the Sacrament.

The power to convey and impart to us these spiritual blessings lies in the words "Given and shed for you for the remission of sin". By these words Christ has placed forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation into the Sacrament, the body and blood being the seal of his promise. Therefore these words are, besides the bodily eating and drinking, the chief thing in the Sacrament.

How do we receive this benefit? We receive this benefit only by believing these words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins."

When Christ tells us that his body was given and his blood was shed "for the remission of our sins", He expects us to believe this; and believing these words, we have "what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins". Faith is the hand that takes what the words of Christ here offer. Such faith is spiritual eating and drinking. In this way we appropriate to ourselves the blessings of the Sacrament, while with our mouths we receive the pledge of this promise, namely, the body and blood under the bread and wine. All unbelievers who take communion, indeed, also receive the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine, yet lacking faith, they do not receive the blessing, but eat and drink judgment to themselves.

And so whenever we approach the Lord's Table, we must remember the blessings and how it is that God gives us these blessings. May we always recognize and receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation! Amen.