

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)

**Easter 2, April 30, 2017**

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

Hymns: 477, 308:2, 384, 163:6-9, 306:8.

Lessons: Leviticus 23:26-32, 1 Corinthians 1:9-18, Mark 14:22-24.

Sermon Text: John 3:17-18

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our study of the Lord's Supper we have considered what it is, the benefits and blessings of Holy Communion, and the power of the Lord's Supper.

In the Small Catechism, Luther asks a fourth question. He asks "Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament? Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words: 'Given' and 'poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.' But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words 'for you' require nothing but hearts that believe." So today we talk about

**THE PROPER USE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

- 1. Fasting and other outward preparations are not essential.**
- 2. Faith in Jesus is essential.**
- 3. Why are we restrictive in our use of the sacrament, that is,**
- 4. Who should not be admitted to the Lord's Supper and**
- 5. Who should be admitted to the Lord's Supper?**

Luther speaks of fasting and other outward preparations which may serve a good purpose. Why is he talking about such things? In his day the Roman Catholic Church required fasting before receiving communion. Even today, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church." That catechism had the formal approval of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later known as Pope Benedict XVI! (Paragraph 1387, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Doubleday, 1995, Imprimatur: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger)

What is meant by "other outward preparations"? In our bulletins on Communion Sundays, you find the announcement "Jesus of Nazareth invites you to a Banquet in his honor." Sometimes it is so easy to take this meal of forgiveness, of taking into our body the very body and blood of Jesus Christ so casually that we don't make any preparations for it.

We do not have a "dress code" in our church. But a certain amount of decorum is reasonable considering that we came here to worship the Lord God and to receive the assurance of the forgiveness of sins by eating and drinking the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, true God and true man. You do not come here to participate in sports or to go to the beach or to cheer a sports team. You do not come here to show off your clothes. Your parents taught you and still show you by their good example that you should dress modestly and appropriately to worship God. And especially, you want to show respect for the banquet of the body and blood of Jesus Christ you are about to receive. If you were invited to a banquet at the White House or at the Governor's Mansion, you would certainly not wear grubby, worn-out, ripped or immodest clothes. In fact, several years ago an athlete was criticized for wearing flip-flops to a meeting with the president at the White House! You would make it a point to clean your body and to wear your best clothes. Even if your best clothes were only jeans and a t-shirt or overalls – which is probably not the case for most of us, you would want your clothes to be clean and neatly patched. Can you think of any greater banquet than the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins?

So Luther tells us that outward preparation is a fine outward custom. Although we make every effort to approach the Lord's Table dressed appropriately, he reminds us of what is really important. "He is properly

prepared who believes these words: ‘Given’ and ‘poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words ‘for you’ require nothing but hearts that believe.” Faith is necessary for proper preparation. You must believe the Words of Jesus Christ. **“Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** Mark 16:16 (NIV) Faith saves. Unbelief damns eternally. With the Formula of Concord “We believe, teach, and confess also that there is only one kind of unworthy guests, namely, those who do not believe [and] this judgment becomes greater ... by the unworthy use of the Holy Supper,” (Paragraph 18)

Surely you have noticed that we do not invite everyone to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Why are we restrictive in our use of the sacrament? Christ gave only “his disciples” to eat and drink of his body and blood. Judas Iscariot was not present. Jesus did not invite everyone to the Lord’s Supper. They were to eat and drink of the bread and the wine and of his body and blood “in remembrance” of him. Someone cannot remember what he has not learned, so we instruct people about the Lord’s Supper before we commune them.

And so we do not practice “open communion” as some churches do. We practice “close” or “closed” communion. It is closed to many. It is called “close communion” because we are taking into our body the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. This has been called a vertical fellowship (motion up and down) because we are joined with God in heaven. This has also been called a horizontal fellowship because all who receive the Lord’s Supper are united with one another in receiving the true body and blood of Jesus Christ into their bodies. (Motion horizontally).

By partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament we enter into a very intimate communion also with those who partake of the Supper with us and we demonstrate the unity of the Spirit. Therefore we should "break bread" only with those who with us "continue in the Apostles' doctrine", and not with any who publicly hold and defend false teachings. In this way we testify that we are of one faith with those who commune with us.

We must not commune at any other altars. At whatever altar you worship you are confessing agreement with that religion. The Lord’s Supper has been called “altar fellowship”. Altar fellowship presupposes unity in doctrine. As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim that Jesus died for the sins of men and confess our faith in him. Thus those receiving Lord’s Supper should as St. Paul writes **“agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”** 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV)

We do not invite everyone and anyone to come to the Lord’s Supper. Our practice follows the Word of God on what we call “close communion” when we commune only members of our congregation, of the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship, and those who are publicly in complete confessional agreement with us. We instruct our young people in what the sacrament means before inviting them to the Lord’s Supper.

We are also restrictive in our invitations to the Lord’s Supper because the Bible states that unworthy communicants are guilty, not of the bread and wine, but of the body and blood of Christ. **“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”** 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 (NIV)

The wonderful content and purpose of Holy Communion demands a most careful preparation on the part of the communicant. Whoever eats the bread, or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. To eat unworthily is to be in such a spiritual condition or to conduct oneself in such a manner as to be out of harmony with the dignity and the sanctity of the heavenly meal. Should a person come to the Lord's Supper as he would go to any other meal, considering his actions to be the mere eating of bread and the mere drinking of wine; if he feels neither desire for the grace of God nor devotion at the prospect of partaking in the miracle feast, then such a person will be guilty, not merely of a thoughtless eating and drinking, but of desecration of the body and blood of the Lord. He will show that he has neither a concept of his sinfulness nor a longing for the grace of God. Thus his guilt will consist in his hindering the grace of God in the Sacrament, which is ready to bestow upon him forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

It follows, then, for every earnest Christian that one should examine himself, should make a careful test of his own mind and attitude, and should explore all the secret recesses of his heart to see whether he heartily repents of his sins, believes in Jesus Christ, and sincerely and earnestly purposes to amend his sinful life. Having made this examination, a Christian may come and partake of God's meal of grace. The purpose of this admonition is not to scare away such Christians in whom self-examination reveals many sins in thoughts, words, and deeds, but to stimulate the right desire for the grace of God. If you did not want to receive the Sacrament unless you were free from all sins, it would follow that you would never go to the Sacrament. But those who knowingly continue in sins receive the Sacrament unworthily. For the Sacrament has been instituted by Christ the Lord not that people should remain in sins, but that they should obtain forgiveness and grow in sanctity.

Of the unworthy the apostle says he that eats and drinks unworthily, he eats and drinks judgment, condemnation to himself, because he does not discern or recognize the body of Christ. He makes no distinction between an ordinary meal and this heavenly meal. He does not realize that the true body and blood of his Savior are present here, and that for this reason a thoughtless use of the Sacrament is blasphemy and, unrepented, results finally in the righteous punishment of God. For he who approaches the table of the Lord in such a spirit of frivolousness will indeed also receive the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine, but not as that of his Redeemer, rather as that of his Judge, who will, on the last day, demand an account of him with sharp reckoning, since the outward behavior is only an indication and demonstration of the unbelief of the heart.

Who should not be admitted to the Lord's Supper? As we teach about Holy Communion, we emphasize that the following should not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

First, those who are manifest unbelievers. Anyone who is plainly, openly an unbeliever would have no respect for and no faith in God. Secondly, those who are manifestly impenitent (plainly impenitent). Although we cannot look into anyone's heart except our own, we do not commune those who are openly, plainly, manifestly impenitent, that is, not repentant. Such a life and behavior is open for others to see. Anyone who is plainly impenitent must learn again of his or her sin from the law of God and must repent before receiving the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament. Then, upon repentance, such a one would be welcomed at the Lord's Table. Third, it goes without saying that those who are of a different faith should not receive the Lord's Supper. "Those who are of a different faith" means those who do not believe or teach the same as we do, as we mentioned before. Fourth, those who have not been instructed in the truth and hence cannot "remember" the Lord's death. We instruct from the Word of God both our young people and adults who wish to learn about our church, often using Luther's Small Catechism. You must know what the Lord's Supper is and what it does for you. Fifth, we do not commune those who are not able to examine themselves. For this we most commonly use the examples of someone who is mentally incapable of self-examination, or obviously, is unconscious. Those with mental inadequacies that prevent them from recognizing their own sinfulness and expressing that would be included here. Many can learn that "Jesus died for my sins" yet not recognize that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present in the sacrament. Finally, we do not commune those who have caused offense and have not removed it. Offense, that is, causing someone to sin, is discussed in Matthew 18.

So we also ask "to whom does God want us to give Holy Communion"? God wants us to give Holy Communion to repentant sinners; only to those who have been instructed so that they know the meaning of Christ's death; only to those who are able to examine themselves, and only to those who are one with us in all we believe and teach.

Jesus urges us to come to Holy Communion often because by Holy Communion he wants to assure us that he forgives all our sins. He wants to strengthen our weak faith; and as we proclaim our unity of faith in our Lord's death, we also encourage each other in our Christian faith and lives. And so we come to the sacrament to receive the blessings of the Lord's Supper, which also strengthens us in Christian living because it renews our desire to thank Christ for all that he did in love for us.

May the Lord's Supper always truly be a meal of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation for all of us. Amen.