

Confirmation 2020-21
Session 26 - Holy Communion

Background Information

So this is odd. We are going to discuss Holy Communion as we live our lives in isolation. Holy Communion is all about getting together, hearing the story, and remembering God's great love for us in that while we were still lost in our sinfulness God reached down and saved us through his son Jesus Christ, our Lord. No getting together to discuss that at this time!

For being so central to the Christian faith, Holy Communion has a bit of an identity crisis. Is it an act of remembering Jesus the person? A magic meal? Sometimes we're not even sure what to call it: The Lord's Supper? The Eucharist? Holy Communion? The Sacrament of the Altar? It's all very messy – just like a great dinner.

Like Holy Baptism, Holy Communion is a sacrament – earthly elements used according to God's command and connected with God's word. Because Jesus is truly present in the elements of bread and wine, we believe this sacrament is effective in giving us the things Jesus promised – namely, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

Jesus commanded his disciples to take and eat and drink the bread and wine and to "do this in remembrance of me" But the sacrament of Holy Communion is not just a way of remembering Jesus- if that were the case, it would be something *we do*, a work, but it's really something God does. Instead, when we come together in what can well be described as communion (that is fellowship or community), we're uniting as the body of Christ to recall and receive God's promise to us.

A good (albeit necessarily incomplete) understanding of communion comes from that distinction – God is the one at work in communion, not us. We're not sacrificing Jesus again every time we share this meal. We're not doing hocus-focus to turn bread into flesh. Instead, God, in Jesus Christ, has already done what we cannot do for ourselves. God is already present in, with, and under the elements

While the identity crisis of Holy Communion can lead us to more questions than we started with, such as how to distribute the sacraments or who gets it, the place

to which we return is simple, even in its complexity: This is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This meal is for you. Do this and remember.

We take communion regularly because Jesus commanded it (1 Cor. 11:25b). If Jesus lived down the street from us, we would rush to hear his words every single day. In the same way, we return to the table over and over, week after week, not because *we have to*, but because *we get to!* God knows we need the life that's received in communion with our neighbors, and that's why we're called to fill that need regularly.

It's bread and wine, but it's not just bread and wine. It might seem weird for our modern minds to trust that Jesus is really present in the elements, but this was a big deal for Martin Luther. Luther said the elements are surrounded by God's Word and bound up in it so that Christ is "in, with, and under" the elements. The simplest way to put it? "God is here." It's not by sleight of hand, and it's not play-acting. When we hear "This is the body of Christ, this is the blood of Christ given for you," that's exactly what we're talking about.

The rules matter, but not as much as Jesus' promises. Churches – even Lutheran churches – struggle over the hows of the Eucharist. Do I hold my hands like this? How does our community of faith decide who should receive the sacrament? Am I taking this seriously enough? The truth is this stuff matters. It's good to take it seriously. But it's better to remember that forgiveness is a gift freely given out of God's grace. So while we might do communion differently than the church down the street (and are convinced that our way is the only way to do it), let's not make the things that don't matter, matter. And let's not let the things that don't matter separate us.

Luther's Small Catechism – The Sacrament of the Altar

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

Instituted by Jesus Christ himself, it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, and also St. Paul, write thus: "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. Do this 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 covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

We are told in the words "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?

The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require truly believing hearts.

Essay Questions

Write 150 words per each assignment below:

Answer both of the following:

- 1) Read Luke 22:14-20. The four things that Jesus does here – taking food, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it away – show up at other places in Jesus' story too, such as in the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:16). Revealing himself to his disciples (Luke 24:30) Why do you think Jesus broke the bread? How does the meaning change when you think of the bread as Jesus' body?
- 2) Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul wrote that we are supposed to prepare ourselves for the reception of Holy Communion and that to fail to do so

is to "drink judgement against themselves." How can we prepare ourselves to come to Holy Communion? What do you suppose Paul meant by "drink judgment against themselves." Will this change your attitude about taking Holy Communion?

Answer two of the following:

- 3) Is *breaking* generally a good thing or bad thing? Why? What things do you share with other people by breaking them apart? Why is this good or necessary?
- 4) When you take something apart and eat it (like a cow becomes a burger, or a banana is peeled to get to the fruit inside) with a thankful heart, does it go away? Or does it become energy to help you grow, work, and play? How is that like Jesus in Holy Communion?
- 5) Lutherans do not take Holy Communion by ourselves. Why do you suppose that is?
- 6) Lutherans come forward and gather around the altar or at least face the altar to receive Holy Communion. Other Christian traditions pass the communion out to the people in the pews. Why do you suppose Lutherans do it the way we do?
- 7) Typically, only the ordained clergy (the pastor) preside at Holy Communion. Why do you suppose that is?
- 8) Even among Lutheran churches, who is allowed to take Holy Communion is different. Why do you suppose that is?

Answer both of the following:

- 9) What do you consider the best part of receiving Holy Communion?
- 10) What do you do during Holy Communion? Are there ritual words you say or think as you take the elements?