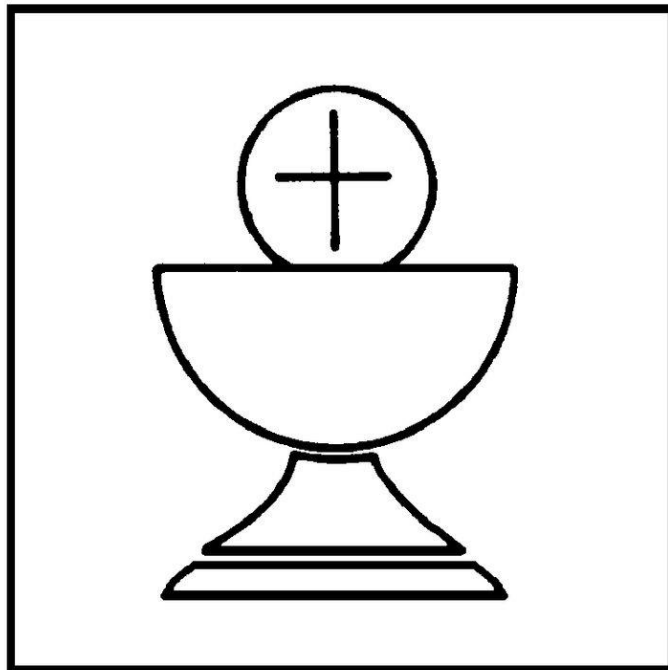


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# THE LORD'S SUPPER

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Four sermons preached at St Mark's Lutheran Church,  
Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015



Pastor Stephen van der Hoek

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27 Hampden Road, Mount Barker, SA

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## Introduction

Dear readers,

I hope these sermons are useful to you in this booklet format! Much of what I have written here is my reflections of 15 years. I've added in some pictures, and for those who want to delve further, I've added in some extra details in the footnotes, to give references, and to give some of the background to some of my arguments. I have tried as much as possible to make sure that my arguments are supported by Scripture and are biblical. Some of the references also come from the Book of Concord, which is the Lutheran confession of faith, made up of the creeds and different statements written in the 1500s. Even though the Book of Concord is not Scripture, Lutherans believe that it is a true explanation of the Scripture.

*Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:13-15)*

God's richest blessings to you!

Pastor Stephen van der Hoek  
Palm Sunday 2015

Sermon 1  
**This is my body, this is my blood.**

*Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'd like to begin today with St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11, which says:

**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."**

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

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Maybe you don't think the Lord's Supper is very important. There are many Christians who don't. Why should we?

Well, everything we believe about the Lord's Supper comes from what we call the *Words of Institution*. Every time we have the Lord's Supper in church, the pastor recites these words about the history of Jesus' last supper. And these words appear in the New Testament 4 times, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and then also in 1 Corinthians<sup>1</sup>. Now normally, I would think that something written out 4 times like this in the New Testament is something that is very important for our Christian life!

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<sup>1</sup> Here are the four versions of the *Words of Institution*.

Matthew 26:26—29 says, "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 the 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"

Mark 14:22—25: "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 the 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."

Luke 22:19—20: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

1 Corinthians 11:23-25: "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, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

But also, it would seem that the Lord's Supper is a very important thing because of when Jesus actually instituted it. It was done **on the night when he was betrayed** (1 Cor 11:23). This is the Thursday night before Good Friday, the night before he went to suffer and die for the sin of the world—his last night before his death.

In the Old Testament, we read about the old patriarch Jacob and how he calls his 12 sons together and gives them each a blessing before he dies. Before Jesus dies, he also gathers together his 12 disciples for his last supper.

It's almost like Jesus' command to the disciples to carry out the Lord's Supper is like writing a will. When we write a will, we might write down what different people in our family are going to get as their inheritance: so-and-so will get the house, so-and-so will get the car, so-and-so will get this amount of money. And if we were to write a will, there are laws in place to make sure that a person's final wishes are followed to the letter, because this is so incredibly important.

How much more important do you think it would be if Jesus himself wrote a will. And if we treat a person's final wishes as so important when we read their will, how much more so do you think Jesus' words would be—the words not just of a man but of the Son of God himself—that he says to his disciples as his dying wish, that he says on the night when he was betrayed.

But there's a difference between when we read a person's will and when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. When we read a person's will, we read it when they are no longer around, because they have died. But Jesus has not only died, but he has also risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven—so when we read his will, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, Jesus is not dead, but he is alive. In fact, Jesus is the only person whose will we read in the person's presence. Jesus is not dead and buried, but has risen from the dead, and so he is *here*, and we read his will *in his presence* and distribute his property and his gifts not in his absence but in his presence.

In the Gospel of Luke and in 1 Corinthians we read the words of Jesus: **Do this in remembrance of me** (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:25). Is there any other place where Jesus says that we should do something in remembrance of him? Surely, the Lord's Supper must be something that is just so incredibly important, in fact, it must be one of the most important things—something right at the centre of the church, something that is our greatest desire as Christians, something that we yearn to be part of, something that we love doing and enjoying.

And so, in our sermon today, we are going to talk about *what the Lord's Supper is*. Next week, we'll talk about what it's for, but today we're going to talk about what it is.

In the Lutheran church, the way that our Lutheran theology works is like this: we should never ask, “what does the church teach?”, but “what does the Scripture teach?” As

Lutherans, we should seek to believe nothing that God doesn't actually teach in the Scripture himself. The bible itself is the clear and pure word of God, so if we want to know what to believe about something, we need to go straight to the Scripture. We don't consult our reason, and we don't consult tradition—we consult the Scripture<sup>2</sup>.

Also, the Lutheran Church has a confession a faith about many topics. This confession of faith is compiled in a number of documents which make up the Book of Concord. So as a Lutheran pastor, what I intend to explain to you about the Lord's Supper over the next four weeks is what the Scripture teaches about the Lord's Supper. Also, the Lutheran Church has a united, unanimous teaching on the Lord's Supper and what I hope to teach is our church's teaching on the subject. The simplest and shortest confession of faith of the Lutheran Church is the Small Catechism, which has a section on the Lord's Supper, together with a series of question and answers in the back for people who want to prepare to go the Lord's Supper.

So what does Jesus actually say that the Lord's Supper is?

Well, he took bread. And he blessed the bread, and gave it to his disciples and he said: **This is my body.** (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:24)

And then he took a cup of wine. And he blessed it, and he gave it to his disciples and he said: **This is my blood.** (Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24)

So it has always been our church's teaching that in the Lord's Supper, this bread is actually Christ's body, and this wine is actually Christ's blood. And the reason why we believe this is simply because Jesus said: **This is my body. This is my blood.** It's as simple as that.

Let's read what the Small Catechism says about it.<sup>3</sup>

*What is the Sacrament of the Altar?*

**It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ  
under the bread and wine,  
instituted by Christ Himself  
for us Christians to eat and to drink.**

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<sup>2</sup> In the Book of Concord (our Lutheran confession of faith), it states, "First, we receive and embrace with our whole heart the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel. They are the only standard and norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged." (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Summary § 3. McCain: 508)

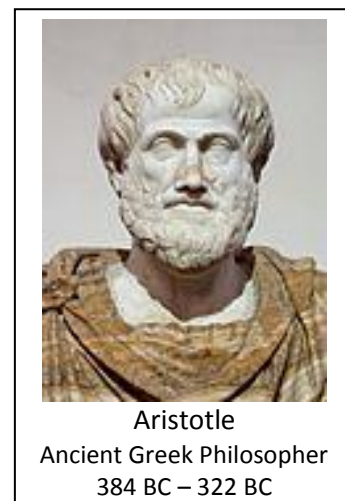
<sup>3</sup> *The Small Catechism: 1986 Translation*, Martin Luther, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, p22.



What is first of all important here is that we don't believe that the bread and wine *represents*, or *symbolises* Christ's body and blood, but that it *is* his body and blood.

Now, you might have some friends who go to other churches, who don't believe this about the Lord's Supper. We'll come to this in a minute. But I want you to take something into consideration: what we believe about the Lord's Supper is the most common view held all throughout Christian history, and most Christians who are alive today in the world believe this<sup>4</sup>.

But someone might say? Isn't this what Catholics believe? Well, yes—they do believe that in the Lord's Supper is the body and blood of Christ, but they use the philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle to explain it, which gets them into problems. Basically, Aristotle believed that something like bread has an “idea of bread” behind it. There's something called “breadness” that makes us recognise bread when we see it. There's something called “glassness” which makes me recognise a glass when I see it. Now, in most cases, we know something is bread, because it tastes like bread, it looks like bread, it smells like bread, it feels like bread. But the Roman Catholic Church believe that even though it looks like bread, feels like bread, it's not actually bread—it's Christ's body<sup>5</sup>. Now, it's a strange thing that Jesus' Supper should need to be explained using the methods of an ancient Greek philosopher.



But anyway, in the Lutheran Church, we agree that the Lord's Supper is the body and blood of Christ<sup>6</sup>. But the bread and wine are the things that Jesus uses to give us his body and blood. He doesn't drop them straight out of heaven for us. He gives them to us using bread and wine. As Christians, we're not interested in eating bread and wine—if you want

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<sup>4</sup> Up until the 1500s, most Christians believed that the word “is” meant “is”. Even today, the Roman Catholic Church (the largest world-wide Christian denomination with 1.2 billion people), the Eastern Orthodox Church (225-330 million people), the Lutheran Church (80 million people), the Oriental Orthodox Churches (eg Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian, possibly up to 70 million people), and many Anglicans who affiliate with the “High Church” movement or the “Anglo-Catholic” movement also believe this. [Statistics from Wikipedia.]

<sup>5</sup> The technical name for this teaching is called “transubstantiation”. In philosophy, the fact that a thing is a “glass” is called its *substance*, but the concept of “glassness” is called its *accidents*. So the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the *substance* changes but not the *accidents*. The Lutheran Book of Concord states: “We unanimously reject...transubstantiation. It is taught in the papacy that during the Holy Supper the bread and wine lose their substance and natural essence, and that they are annihilated. They say they are changed into Christ's body, and only the outward form remains.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII § 22. McCain: 489).

<sup>6</sup> The Lutheran teaching is summarised in the Book of Concord, like this: “Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper. They reject those who teach otherwise.” (Augsburg Confession, X).

to do that, go to a nice bakery and a nice winery and buy yourself some good stuff! The bread and wine are the things which Christ uses to give us his body to eat and his blood to drink. In some sense, it's a bit like the way I carry money in my wallet. I might say to someone, "Pay for that with my money", and I give them my wallet. The person would be pretty silly to say, "Don't be silly—that's not money, that's just a wallet." The wallet is what I use to give you the money. In the same way, the bread and wine is what Christ uses to give you his body to eat and his blood to drink.

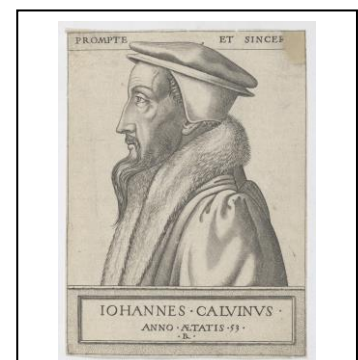
So this is our basic understanding of what the Lord's Supper is.



Ulrich Zwingli  
Swiss reformer  
1484-1531

When Martin Luther was alive, there were two other men who had other ideas about the Lord's Supper. And the ideas of these two men still survive today in many Protestant churches. The first man was Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli was a reformer from Switzerland, and he said that the bread in the Lord's Supper is simply bread, and the wine in the Lord's Supper is simply wine, and are not the body and blood of Christ, but are simply a remembrance meal. He believed this because of the words: "Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>7</sup> Most Christians who are not Catholic or Orthodox or Lutheran believe this. This is not the Lutheran teaching, and Lutherans believe this is not the teaching of Jesus.

Also, there was another man, called John Calvin, who believed something similar, but said that the bread is not actually Christ's body, but when we eat the bread, we feed on Christ's body in heaven in our minds, because Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, and not in the Lord's Supper. So we don't eat Christ's body with our mouths, but only with our minds. With our mouths we only eat bread. Now, this view is found mostly in the Presbyterian Church, and is also quite common in the Anglican Church. Now, this is also not the Lutheran teaching, and Lutherans believe that this is not the teaching of Jesus. We believe that in the Lord's Supper what we eat is Christ's body and what we drink is his blood.



John Calvin  
French reformer  
1509—1564

There's another way in which people can mock the Lutheran teaching. They make out as if we're eating Jesus' flesh, like meat, and grinding up his bones with our teeth. This is not what we believe, and this is blasphemy<sup>8</sup>. Jesus didn't say: This is my arm, or this is my

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller explanation of how the word "remembrance" should be understood, see pages 10 and 11.

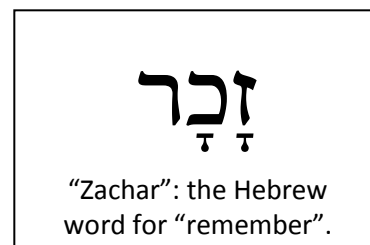
<sup>8</sup> The technical name for this idea is called "Capernaite eating" (pronounced "Ca-per-na-IT-ic"), because when Jesus went to visit Capernaum, we read that "the Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" (John 6:52). The Book of Concord states: "We utterly reject and

fingernail. He said: **This is my body**. And for us, this is the body of Christ that died and rose from the dead, and that is filled with all of Christ’s supernatural power and the Holy Spirit.

So how do we explain this? Many Christians like Zwingli and Calvin say: “It’s just not possible—Jesus can’t be in two places at once.” Is Jesus seated at the right hand of God, or is he in the Lord’s Supper? Well, yes, of course, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father. But when Jesus ascended into heaven, he didn’t go up in a space ship to another planet, so that we can find him at coordinate J14 on map 105. When we pray to God, we talk to him quietly and sometimes in our heads, because we believe he’s here. God is to be found everywhere and anywhere. And if God is everywhere, then his right hand is everywhere. And if Jesus is seated at God’s right hand, then it means that Jesus both in spirit and soul, and in his flesh and blood, can be wherever he chooses to be and wherever he says he will be. So Jesus is not stuck up in the clouds somewhere. But he is seated at God’s right hand so that he can be wherever he says he will be. So, yes, Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father, but he is also in the Lord’s Supper. This Lord’s Supper is prepared by God’s hands and given to us by God’s hands.<sup>9</sup>

But what about the words: “Do this in remembrance of me”? Is the Lord’s Supper just a memorial meal, but not his body and blood? In English, when we say, “remember”, we often mean something that happens in our minds. But in the bible, in Hebrew, “remember” means something that we do.

So, for example, there is an occasion in the book of Genesis, where Joseph is in prison, and he interprets the dreams of two prisoners. One of the prisoners is the Pharaoh’s cupbearer. Joseph asks the cupbearer when he gets out of prison: **Remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh** (Genesis 40:14). When Joseph says, “Remember me”, he means, “*Do something* to get me out of prison!” It would be no use for the cupbearer to simply stand in front of Pharaoh and think about Joseph, but not do anything about it!



Also, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, we read about a husband and wife, Elkanah and Hannah. Hannah is barren and they are unable to have any children. Hannah prays for a long time to have a child. Eventually we read: **Elkanah knew his wife and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son** (1 Samuel

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condemn the Capernaite eating of Christ’s body, as though we taught that His flesh were torn with the teeth and digested like other food.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII §42. McCain: 490).

<sup>9</sup> The Book of Concord quotes Martin Luther where he says: “God’s “right hand” is everywhere. Christ is placed there in deed and in truth according to His human nature. He is present, rules, and has in His hands, and beneath His feet, everything that is in heaven and on earth as Scripture says in Ephesians 1:22, where no other man or angel, but only Mary’s Son is placed. Therefore, He can do this.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII §12. McCain: 488-489).

1:19-20). Now when it says, “The Lord remembered her”, it doesn’t mean, he just *thought about* her, but it means that God allowed her to conceive a child. God actually *did* something for her when he remembered her.

Or one other example. I happen to be married. And once a year, my wife and I have a wedding anniversary. Now could you imagine a couple on their wedding anniversary, and the husband doesn’t mention the anniversary all day. Then late at night, the wife gets a bit upset, and says: “Have you forgotten something?...Like our wedding anniversary?” And he says: “No, I haven’t forgotten. I’ve been thinking about it all day.” Now, that’s no use. He needs to say something to her, congratulate her, give her a hug and a kiss, buy a present or a card, some flowers and chocolate. If he remembers the anniversary, it means that he does something.

And so, when Jesus says, **Do this in remembrance of me**, it doesn’t mean, that this is just bread and wine, and then in our minds somewhere we remember Jesus. No—we remember Jesus by doing something. We remember him by eating his body and drinking his blood.

If all of this was so impossible for Jesus, why would he mess around with words on the night he was betrayed? Doesn’t Jesus know how to talk properly? Sure, sometimes he says, “I am the door”, or “I am the vine”, but this is not a sermon here. This is Jesus’ last will and testament to his disciples—do you think he’s going to say something that’s not really true? Is Jesus a liar? If he passes around bread and says, “This is my body”, and he has all the power in heaven and earth in his hands, don’t you think he can do it?<sup>10</sup>

I remember once sitting with a guy who believed what Zwingli believed, that it was just a memorial meal. And he went around and around, telling me all the reasons why the Lord’s Supper is not Christ’s body and blood. And I simply said to him, “The only problem with what you say is that Jesus said: **This is my body.**” He got frustrated and said, “You Lutherans! When all your arguments fall in a heap, you just come back to that.” And I said, “But I’m not the one who’s arguing with Jesus.”

If we want to take Jesus’ words seriously, the only thing that is possible to believe is that when Jesus says: “This is my body”, that it means, that it’s his body that we eat in the Lord’s Supper. And we know this, because of the simplicity and the clarity of Jesus’ words. He said it, I believe it, and that settles it.

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<sup>10</sup> The Book of Concord quotes Luther where he says in connection to the Lord’s Supper: “God’s Word is not false or deceitful.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII §13. McCain: 489). Also, it states: “We believe, teach, and confess that the words of Christ’s testament are not to be understood in any other way than the way they read, according to the letter. So the bread does not signify Christ’s absent body and the wine His absent blood. But, because of the sacramental union, the bread and wine are truly Christ’s body and blood.” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, VII § 7. McCain: 488).

Next week in our sermon, we're going to talk about what the Lord's Supper is for, the reasons why Jesus gives it to us. For now, I'd like to leave you with the simple words of Jesus: **This is my body. This is my blood.** If we really thought about these eight words, they should completely blow our minds! We can't begin to imagine what an amazing miracle Christ performs for us in the Lord's Supper week after week! If what Jesus says is true, (and of course it is true!) it would change the way we think forever, the way we act, the way we behave, the way we pray. These words: **This is my body**, show us the wonderful mystery of the Lord's Supper, and that the Lord's Supper is not an add-on, but is right at the heart and the centre of our faith.

Amen.

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us your body to eat and your blood to drink in the Lord's Supper. Teach us to receive these wonderful gifts from your hands with thanksgiving. Amen.*



## Sermon 2

# Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins

*Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'd like to begin today with words from the gospels of Luke and Matthew which says:

**This is my body which is given for you.**

**This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Last week, when we began our sermon series on the Lord's Supper, I particularly talked about the *Words of Institution* (the words which Christ spoke on the night he was betrayed). We talked about how this is Christ's will, and how the Lord's Supper must be a very important thing since these words are written down 4 times in the New Testament.

But also, I spoke about the words of Christ "This is my body", and how it is our church's confession of faith that in the Lord's Supper, we really do eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and nothing less than his body and blood. And I also spoke about two common

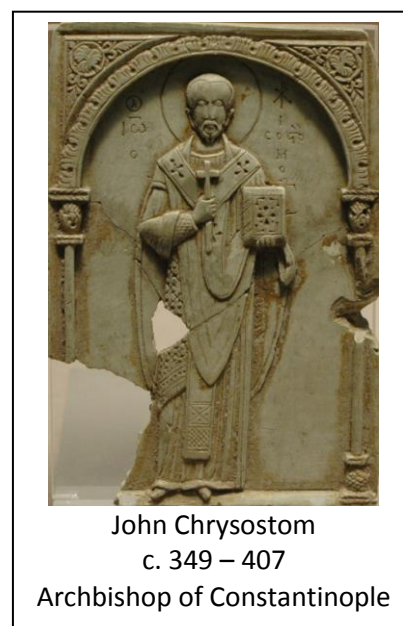
objections to this teaching: that it is impossible for Christ to be seated at the right hand of God and also to be in the Lord's Supper at the same time. But God is not located in one place on a map, but he is to be found everywhere. If Jesus, in his human flesh, is seated at the right hand of God, it means that he is able to be wherever he promises to be, since God's right hand is everywhere.

The other thing we talked about was the objection which says that because Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me", the Lord's Supper must simply be just bread and wine, which is a remembrance meal. But we talked about the fact that in the bible the word "remember" doesn't mean simply something we think about, but something we do, a bit like how someone might "remember" their wedding anniversary by actually doing something like buying a present. So we remember Jesus in the Lord's Supper by eating his body and drinking his blood.

As we begin our second part of this series today, I'd like us to think a little bit more about the words, **This is my body** and **This is my blood**. The thing that actually makes the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ is word of God itself. It's not a pastor who transforms these things by some power which he possesses, and it's not your faith that makes these things the body and blood of Christ. It's the word of God that does it. So every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the pastor always recites the words which Christ said, because these words are the power that brings about the true presence of Christ's body and blood. So without Christ's words, we don't believe that Christ's body and blood would be there.

In the Book of Concord, which is the Lutheran confession of faith, to help understand this point, the authors quote a pastor from the 300s, whose name was John Chrysostom. He was the bishop at the Holy Wisdom Church<sup>11</sup> in Constantinople which is modern-day Istanbul. The Holy Wisdom Church is still standing, but it became a mosque at some time in history, and is now a museum. John Chrysostom said this:

"Christ Himself prepared this table and blesses it. For no man makes the bread and wine set before us into Christ's body and blood, only Christ Himself, who was crucified for us. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest. But by God's power and grace, by the word, where Christ says: "This is My body", the elements presented are consecrated in the Supper. The declaration "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" was spoken only once. But it is ever effective in nature, so that it is fruitful and multiplies. So also this declaration, "This is my body; this is my blood", was spoken once. But even to this day and up to His second coming it is



<sup>11</sup> Often this church is known by its Greek name, the *Hagia Sophia*.



effective and works so that in the Supper of the Church His true body and blood are present.”<sup>12</sup>



The Holy Wisdom Church (Hagia Sophia) in Constantinople (Istanbul) taken by some members of St Mark's congregation on their recent holiday. The four towers (called *minarets*) were not part of the original design, but were added when the building became a mosque, and were used to call people to prayer.

Can you see what he says? It's Christ's word that makes it his body and blood.

Sometimes people might say: Well, I'll just believe what I like about it. And there are some churches that practically teach nothing about the Lord's Supper, and leave it up to the individual to decide what they think. But this would not be faithful to Christ's words: **This is my body**. Either it's his body, or it's not. It's got nothing to do with whether or not you believe it's his body. It has to do with whether it *is* his body. So, the Lord's Supper is the body and

blood of Christ, whether or not a person believes in it.

Now this is a very important thing, because the bible speaks about two ways in which we can receive the Lord's Supper. Either we can receive it in a good way or in a bad way. Either we receive it to our blessing, or we receive it to our judgment. The body and blood of Christ are still the same, however we receive it, but there is a good way to receive the Lord's Supper, and a bad way to receive it.

So St Paul says: **Whoever 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** (1 Corinthians 11:27).

Do you notice? If the body and blood of Christ weren't there, how could anyone be guilty of sinning against it?

So what does St Paul say about it? He says: **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**

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII §76. McCain: 574-575.

**you are weak and ill and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.** (1 Corinthians 11:28—31)

So St Paul says that we shouldn't eat and drink without **discerning the body**. This means, if we don't believe that the body and blood of Christ are in the Lord's Supper, if we don't discern Christ's body and blood there in the supper, we eat and drink a judgment upon ourselves.

But there's another aspect which we need to consider too. Jesus doesn't simply say: **This is my body** and **this is my blood**, but he says: **This is my body, which is given for you** (Luke 22:19). **This is my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins** (Matthew 26:28).

So when we come to receive the Lord's Supper, our simple acknowledgement that this is Christ's body and blood is not enough. We also need to hear Christ's words that these things are **given for you** and **shed for you for the forgiveness of sins**.

Now, why is this important? Well—have a think about it. Here is Christ's perfect human body, united to his divinity in the one person. And here you are to receive it—and you are not perfect, in fact, you are far from perfect. And here is Christ's holy and precious blood, which was poured out for you on Calvary. And here you are to receive it—and your blood is not holy and precious. How can it happen that these two things are going to mix: you with all your imperfections and Christ's holy, precious, perfect body and blood?

Well, there's only one way in which these two things can come together, and that is that Christ has to forgive your sins. If Christ is going to come and enter into your body in this amazing way, surely you would normally be completely destroyed because of your sin. But this is Christ's body which is **given for you** and Christ's blood which is **shed for you for the forgiveness of sins**. The only way that the Lord's Supper can work is if Christ forgives your sins. In fact, he gives his body and blood to you precisely so that you can receive the forgiveness of sins, and be strengthened in this forgiveness through it.

And so, when we come to receive the Lord's Supper, we need to acknowledge that this is Christ's body and blood, but also, that we are sinners. St Paul says: **Let a person examine himself**. Let a person examine his faith whether he or she discerns the body, but also let a person examine his heart whether he or she is a sinner. If you're not a sinner, then the sacrament is not for you. If you're not a sinner, and you don't believe you're a sinner, then the only way you can receive this gift is to your judgment.

In the Lutheran Church, we often talk about sin and forgiveness in very black and white terms, and the reason for this, and part of the reason why we have confession and absolution in the church is to prepare people to receive the Lord's Supper. The bible speaks in very black and white terms about the Lord's Supper, and so we also want to talk in very black and white terms about examining ourselves.



Nobody is worthy to receive the Lord's Supper. But when we acknowledge our *unworthiness*, then we receive it in a worthy way, in a worthy manner<sup>13</sup>. It doesn't depend on us and on our worthiness. It depends on Christ and his word which promises us the forgiveness of sins. So the Book of Concord explains it like this:

We believe, teach and confess also that there is only one kind of unworthy guests: those who do not believe. About these guests it is written in John 3:18, "Whoever does not believe is condemned already." And this judgment becomes greater and more grievous, being aggravated by the unworthy use of the Holy Supper.<sup>14</sup>

And then it says:

We believe, teach, and confess that no true believer—as long as he has living faith, however weak he may be—receives the Holy Supper to his judgment. For the Supper was instituted especially for Christians weak in faith, yet repentant. It was instituted for their consolation and to strengthen their weak faith.<sup>15</sup>

It should be a wonderful joy for us to come and receive the Lord's Supper for our comfort and strength! We might say: "But I have such a weak faith." Well, weak faith is still faith. You're not saved by strength of faith, but by faith in all of its weakness.

Let's read together what Luther writes in the Small Catechism about this<sup>16</sup>:

*What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?*

***These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.***

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<sup>13</sup> If you know your grammar, here is an explanation of this point: In 1 Corinthians 11:30, it talks about eating and drinking unworthily (or "in an unworthy manner"). It doesn't mention being *unworthy* (an adjective, in Greek: ἀνάξιος [*anaxios*]), but receive the supper *unworthily* (an adverb, in Greek: ἀναξίως [*anaxiōs*]). In Greek, the adverb and the adjective are pronounced almost exactly the same, but spelled differently. (The adverb has a long "o"). So sometimes there has been some confusion about this. We come to the Lord's Supper not as *worthy* (adjective) people, but we come to receive it *worthily* (adverb).

<sup>14</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome VII §18. McCain: 489.

<sup>15</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome VII § 19. McCain: 489.

<sup>16</sup> *The Small Catechism: 1986 Translation*, Martin Luther, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, p23.

We've spoken about how we come to receive the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. But Luther also talks about "life and salvation". Why is that? Why is it that "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation"?

Well, imagine that you had a friend, who had a large house with all kinds of nice things in it, a swimming pool, and an exotic pet, like a monkey. And it's such a joy for you to go around there on hot days and swim in the pool, and when it's not hot, you can feed the monkey peanuts and bananas. Then you and your friend have a fight. You decide it's about time for you to go and visit him. Now, what happens if your friend doesn't forgive you? Well, you don't get to go in the front door. But if your friend does forgive you, then, you get to go in, and enjoy all the things in your friend's house, you get to swim in their pool, and feed their monkey. And most importantly, you get to enjoy your friend's company and friendship.

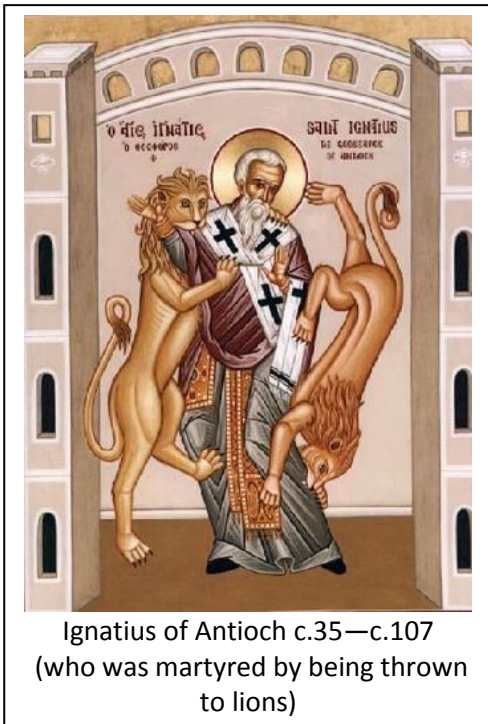
The same goes with Jesus. He promises us his forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. And when he gives us his forgiveness, he lets us in his house, and we get to come and enjoy all the wonderful gifts of heaven, and most importantly, the company and friendship of Jesus. So you can see: *where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*

So what does it mean when it says: *life and salvation*? Well, it means that Jesus offers us here all the wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control** (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus invites us to come and ask him for these gifts here. But also, we receive a down-payment here in the Lord's Supper of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Luther said: When you come to the Lord's Supper, go to it like you're going to your death, so that when you die, it will be just like going to the Lord's Supper.

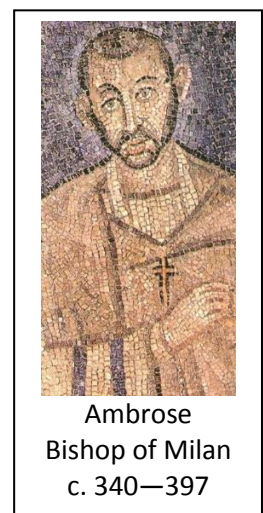
So, what will happen when we die? We will receive the complete and total perfect healing of our bodies and our souls, and we will become completely like Christ. And this is what is given here in the Lord's Supper. This is the body and blood of Christ. And when we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ here, we are receiving a foretaste of our heavenly body in the next life. This is not just food of the soul, but for the body. We say at the end of the Lord's Supper: *The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul until life eternal.*

So, when we come to the Lord's Supper, we come to it with all our sins, and all of our sins of weakness. But we also come to the Lord's Supper with all the weaknesses of our bodies, and we ask for Christ's healing which we know that we will receive completely perfectly in the next life. The Lord's Supper is therefore not something that communicates disease, but this bread and wine is physically united to the body and blood of Christ himself, who has taken upon himself all our diseases. For example, a blind lady comes to the Lord's Supper knowing that this body and blood belongs to the same Christ who healed many blind people all those many years ago, and when she enters into heaven, and when she is resurrected from the dead, that same Jesus will allow her to see him with

her own eyes much more clearly than she has ever seen anything before. As St Paul says: **Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face.** (1 Corinthians 13:12)



So our church’s confession of faith, together with the Christians of the early and mediaeval church, calls the Lord’s Supper a “medicine”. One old writer, called Ignatius from Antioch, in the first generation after the apostles calls the Lord’s Supper a “medicine of immortality, an antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ”.<sup>17</sup> The Book of Concord quotes an old bishop in the early church, Ambrose, who says about the Lord’s Supper: “Because I always sin, I always need to take the medicine.”<sup>18</sup> Luther says the same thing in the Large Catechism: “[We] should regard and use the Sacrament just like a precious antidote against the poison [we] have in [us]. Here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of



Christ forgiveness of sins. It contains and brings with it God’s grace and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.”<sup>19</sup>



But are these people going a bit over the top, when they talk about the Lord’s Supper in this way? Not at all—remember that St Paul said about those who receive the sacrament in an unworthy manner: **This is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died** (1 Corinthians 11:30). So if receiving the Lord’s Supper for judgment brings weakness, illness and death, then receiving the Lord’s Supper to our blessing brings strength, health and life. Or as Luther says in the Catechism: *For where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.* This is why we give the Lord’s Supper to people also in time of sickness and when a person is close to death.

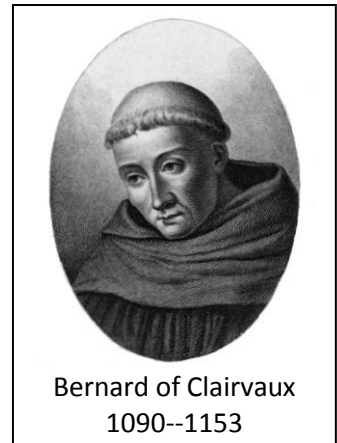
<sup>17</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians § 20, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed Michael W Holmes, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1999, p151. Also quoted in Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol 2, p234.

<sup>18</sup> Augsburg Confession XXIV §33. McCain: 49.

<sup>19</sup> Large Catechism V §70. McCain: 439.

There's a beautiful statement of St Bernard, a Christian writer in the 1100s:

The body of Christ is to the sick a medicine, to the pilgrim a way; it strengthens the weak, delights the strong, heals weariness, preserves health. Through it man becomes more gentle under reproof, more patient under labour, more ardent for love, wiser for caution, more ready to obey, more devoted to giving of thanks.<sup>20</sup>



Let's read one more part of the Catechism<sup>21</sup>:

*How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?*

**Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: "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. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "forgiveness of sins".**

Can you see? *The words...these words...whoever believes these words.* We wouldn't believe any of this if it weren't for *God's word.* As we learn a deeper understanding of the Lord's Supper, our understanding of the power of Christ's word grows too. The word of God is the thing which fuels the Lord's Supper here. The Lord's Supper is never performed in silence, but is always accompanied by Christ's word, so that you can hear it, and when you have heard it, you can believe it.

What wonderful encouraging words of Christ: **This is my body which is given for you! This is my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins! Amen.**

*Lord Jesus Christ, we can't begin to imagine what wonderful treasures you give to us in your Holy Supper. Bless us with your Holy Spirit, that we may receive the Lord's Supper in repentance and faith, and receive from your hands the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation according to your word. Amen.*



<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Martin Chemnitz, tr Fred Kramer, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 1971, p234.

<sup>21</sup> *The Small Catechism: 1986 Translation*, Martin Luther, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, p23.

## Sermon 3

# Do this in remembrance of me

*Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'd like to begin today with the words from 1 Corinthians which says:

**Do this in remembrance of me.**

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Today our sermon will be the third in a series of four sermons about the Lord's Supper. In the first sermon, I spoke about the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Last week, I spoke particularly about the benefits of the Lord's Supper: the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. And this is particularly expressed in the blessing which the pastor speaks after the Lord's Supper: *The body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul unto life eternal.*

Today, I'd like to speak about the words: **Do this in remembrance of me.** The Lord's Supper is not so much something that we do—the most important thing about it is that we receive this wonderful gift of the body and blood of Christ to eat and to drink. But also, the church is also called to *do something*. We don't sit around while the body of Christ drops out of heaven at random. Jesus has called us to particular actions that are to be done **in remembrance** of him.

And so, when we think about these things, we should remember that the church has always sought to pass on this wonderful sacrament throughout the centuries. And we are called to be faithful in **doing this in remembrance of** our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So today's sermon will talk about practical things that have to do with the Lord's Supper. And these things are part of our mission as Christians, pastor and people together, as we seek to shine Christ's light into our community and world.

So what are these things which we are called to **do**? Well, our Lutheran teaching is that there are three actions that make up the Lord's Supper: *consecration, distribution, and reception.*<sup>22</sup> The word "consecrate" means to "set something apart as holy". That has to do with Christ's words where: **he took the bread** and spoke the words: **this is my body, this is my blood.** This is the first thing which Christ calls us to do in remembrance of him.

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<sup>22</sup> "The use or action...means the entire external, visible action of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ: the consecration, the distribution and reception, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of Christ's body and blood." (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII §86. McCain: 576.)

The second thing is distributing it. This is where we read: **He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples.** And the last thing is receiving it. Jesus says: **Take, eat. Drink of it all of you.**

So there's three actions that form the Lord's Supper: *consecration, distribution and reception.* The Book of Concord often states that "nothing is a sacrament without the divinely instituted action"<sup>23</sup>. So it's important for us to know what this action is.

So let's focus on the first action: *the consecration.*

This task is performed by a pastor<sup>24</sup>. The pastoral ministry comes as a continuation of the ministry of the 12 apostles. On the night Jesus was betrayed, he gathered the 12 disciples for the Last Supper, and then sent them out after he rose from the dead. St Paul says: **I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you** (1 Corinthians 11:23). The apostles ordained new pastors, who in turn carried on these things. And this structure still continues today in the church. St Paul says: **This is how one should regard us [pastors], as slaves of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God**<sup>25</sup> (1 Corinthians 4:1).

And so, what is the consecration? The consecration is where the pastor speaks the word of God over this particular bread and this particular wine, so that from that point on the body and blood of Christ are truly present there in those elements<sup>26</sup>. Sometimes in the Lutheran Church, it was taught that the body and blood of Christ were only present when a person *ate and drank* them. But this is not our Lutheran teaching, even though it was taught sometimes in the Lutheran church. The presence comes about because of the *words*

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<sup>23</sup> For example: Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII §73. McCain: 574.

<sup>24</sup> "Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call." (Augsburg Confession XIV. McCain: 39). The expression "rightly ordered call" refers to the call of a pastor, through training, examination and finally, ordination into the office of the ministry. In fact, the expression "rightly ordered call" (in Latin: *rite vocatus*) could also be translated as, "called by means of a *rite* (or ceremony)", which means the "rite of ordination". The biblical basis for this teaching comes from passages such as these: "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21). "How are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:15). "No one takes this honour for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was" (Hebrews 5:4).

<sup>25</sup> There are some letters written by Paul which are written to people by him alone (like Galatians and Ephesians), while there are others who are written together with authors. 1 Corinthians is sent from Paul **and Sosthenes** (1 Corinthians 1:1). In letters which are written only by Paul, he often doesn't talk about himself as "we" or "us". In 1 Corinthians 4:1, when Paul says "this is how one should regard us", he is specifically speaking about himself and Sosthenes (a pastor who is *not* an apostle), but also of all the other apostles and all pastors who share the same ministry as himself and Sosthenes.

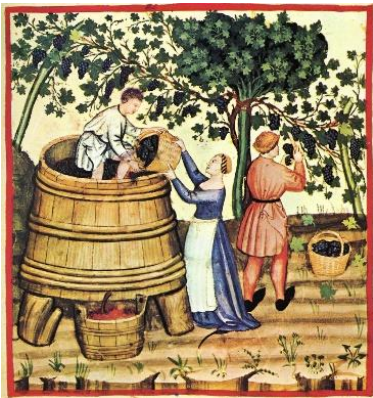
<sup>26</sup> "The elements of bread and wine should be consecrated and blessed for this holy use, so that Christ's body and blood may be administered to us to be eaten and to be drunk, as Paul declares, "the cup of blessing that we bless" [1 Corinthians 10:16]. This indeed happens in no other way than through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration §82. McCain: 573).

of Christ which are spoken at *the consecration*. Otherwise, Christ's words would not be true. Jesus says: **This**--which I am about to give to you--**is my body**. Otherwise, Christ would have needed to say: "This *will* be my body", or "it is *about to be* my body when you eat it". That's not what Jesus said.

St Paul says: **The blessing cup which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?** (1 Corinthians 10:16). St Paul says that the blessing cup is a participation in the blood of Christ, because it is **blessed**. And blessed with what? Blessed with the recitation and repetition of Christ's words which he said on the night he was betrayed<sup>27</sup>.

So what is it that Christ actually consecrated? We read: He **took bread** and wine. Now—it is important that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper that we use bread and wine, and not something else, like chips and coke! Our wafers that we use are actually a type of bread, just not the kind that we often make into toast in the morning. (There's also a kind of wholemeal wafers that are available that are a bit more substantial and taste a bit more bread-like.)

But it is also important that we use wine. We often use a fortified wine, like port, because the higher alcohol content is good for sharing the common chalice, and it's a little bit sweet so that most people won't dislike the taste too much! Now Jesus calls it the "**fruit of the vine**" (Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:18). But this doesn't mean that we should use unfermented grape juice. First of all, Jesus didn't use unfermented grape juice, and in the history of the church, the only people who have used grape juice have been those who don't believe in the real presence of Christ's body and blood anyway.



A picture of wine pressing from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

First of all, this is Christ's institution and it has continued right through many dark times of history where Christians haven't lived in clean and hygienic environments. We read in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that when he saw the man beaten up on the side of the road, he poured over his wounds wine and oil (Luke 10:34). Oil was used as a lotion to soothe his wounds, and wine was used as a disinfectant. I have heard that even now, Bedouin people who live in the deserts of Arabia and North Africa often still carry wine and oil as part of their supplies for this very reason. Now

<sup>27</sup> There is another view which is common in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, that it is not the "Word of Institution" that bring about Christ's presence, but a prayer to the Holy Spirit. (This specific prayer is often called by its technical name: "epiclesis"). Of course, it is a good thing to pray to the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is given through God's word. Prayer only receives God's word, but is not an alternative to it. The relationship between God's word and our prayers is like the difference between a person and a reflection in a mirror. A prayer for the Holy Spirit is only "reflecting" back to God what He says in the Scripture. This is why in the Lutheran Church, priority is given to the recitation of Christ's words, rather than a prayer for the Holy Spirit.



in Israel, grapes would have been harvested in June or July, so by the time Passover came around in March, it would have been well-fermented by then. Sometimes, people have rejected wine for tee-totalling reasons. But Jesus himself was not a tee-totaller. He turned an enormous amount of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). People even accused Jesus of being a **glutton and a drunkard** (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34). Of course, Jesus wasn't either of these things, but this is because he ate food and drank wine with people. Wine is the drink of celebrating—Isaiah says that God will prepare a feast with **well-aged wine** (Isaiah 25:6). We see right in the book of Genesis, where the king Melchizedek brings out a gift of bread and wine to Abraham, and Jesus surely has this in mind since *he was there* when Melchizedek met Abraham (Genesis 14:17-24). Grape juice and Ribena is not the drink of celebrating, in fact, it's the opposite—it's a modern substitute. It's like what carob is to chocolate, or like what soy is to milk. Sure, that doesn't mean that people should get drunk, but we have to be careful that we don't put our own ideas above Jesus' ideas. This is his supper, this is the **Lord's Supper**, and he knows what he's doing.

Sometimes, people think we should have grape juice to accommodate people who might have an alcohol problem. And of course, there have been all kinds of Christians who have struggled and fought with alcoholism. Addiction is a terrible thing, and we Christians love these people and want to be friends to them in their hardship. But this is a different issue, and it's not a reason to change the sacrament. Christ's body and blood could never be the cause for someone to fall into temptation.

So when the consecration is performed, it is like baptism. In baptism, we need water and we need God's word. It wouldn't be a baptism if you used honey or tomato sauce instead. In the Lord's Supper, we need bread and wine, and we need God's word.

So that's the consecration. The second thing we'll talk about now is: the *distribution*. The sacrament needs to be distributed, just as we read: **he broke [the bread] and gave it to the disciples.**

At some point in history, it became the practice in the Roman Catholic Church not to distribute the wine to the people. There were all kinds of reasons given—perhaps some of the reasons were well-intentioned, in that they didn't want to spill it or desecrate it. But Christ's words still stand: **Drink of it, all of you.** This was one of the major issues of the Reformation, where gradually it was brought in that people also commune from the chalice, not just with the bread alone. Since the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church have allowed the chalice to be given, but often the bread is distributed alone, as is the case in our local area<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> In the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church made some reforms at a special council, called the Second Vatican Council (or "Vatican II"). Since that time, the "mass" (a service with the Lord's Supper) has been prayed in the local language of a particular country, whereas before it was always in Latin. It has also been permitted for priests to give lay-people the cup to drink during mass. However, often the consecrated bread is kept aside to give to sick people, which means that they would not receive the consecrated wine. Also,



Now one thing that is quite clear in the Book of Concord is that it was always considered the duty of the pastoral ministry not only to *consecrate* but also to *distribute* the sacrament in both kinds<sup>29</sup>. Until the last couple of years or so, I always thought (like many Lutherans today) that our normal practice was that a pastor distribute the bread and a layperson could distribute the chalice. But I have since learnt that this is not the teaching of the Book of Concord. Now, people might simply dismiss this as a “human law”, but the reason given for this is because St Paul says: **This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God** (1 Corinthians 4:1). Being a steward doesn’t mean that we are “delegators” of the mysteries of God.

Most people today would protest that if the pastor distributed both kinds himself, it would take too long. But even though the practice of having lay-assistants is quite common in the Lutheran Church of Australia, it is a relatively recent practice and is not necessarily common all throughout the world. In the Slovakian Lutheran Church in

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sometimes Romans Catholics have what they call a “communion service” (different from a “mass”), which means they have a service without a priest, but the bread (which has been consecrated somewhere else in another church building by a priest or bishop) is distributed by lay-people. When this happens, the people are only given the Lord’s Supper by means of the consecrated bread, and not with the wine. Traditionalist Catholics such as the *Priestly Fraternity of St Peter* (FFSP, who have a parish in St Peters) or *the Society of Saint Pius X* (SSPX, who have a parish in Wayville) use the older version of the mass completely in Latin, and the cup is not given to laypeople at all. The reason for this is because they believe that when Christ’s body is received, his blood is also present in the body. (This view is called “concomitance”.) Lutherans have always viewed “concomitance” as a theology which was shaped by what they were doing, rather than a practice which came from theology. Why split hairs with this issue, if Jesus simply said about the cup, “Drink of it, all of you?”

<sup>29</sup> In the Augsburg Confession, it states: “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” (Augsburg Confession V 1. McCain: 33). Here the pastoral ministry is described as doing two things: “teaching the Gospel” and “administering the Sacraments”. In recent times, “administering” has often meant “officiating” at the Lord’s Supper—“being in charge of it”—even if others would perform the distribution. However, in the original languages (German and Latin), the word “administrate” (in Latin: *administrandi*) is not used, but a word which means “handing out” or “giving out” (in Latin: *porrigendi*; in German: *Reichen*). If this refers both to the consecration and the distribution, then the same principle applies as discussed in footnote 24: “Our teachers teach than no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.” (Augsburg Confession XIV. McCain: 39). Later, in the Augsburg Confession, it also defines the ministry of bishops (and pastors) like this: “Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of the keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments” (Augsburg Confession XXVIII 5. Tappert: 81). Another passage: “Let us discuss the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly mean a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry. Liturgy agrees well with our belief that one minister who consecrates gives the Lord’s body and blood to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches offers the Gospel to the people. As St Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1), that is, of the Gospel and the Sacraments.” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV (XII) 80. McCain: 232). In the *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, vol 2, on “The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar”, it states: “In assisting with the distribution of the sacrament, lay people do not exercise the office of the keys”. It seems that the Book of Concord does not make this conclusion, but rather the opposite.

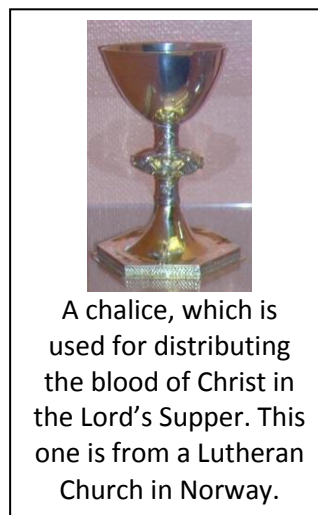
Melbourne, the practice is that communion is celebrated once a month<sup>30</sup>, they are a congregation of 200 of people or more, and the pastor goes around once to lay his hands on each person to give them individual absolution and forgiveness, then he goes around a second time with the body of Christ, and then a third time with the chalice. Of course, it takes a very long time, but this is their practice and it's just accepted that it be done like this.

In the old days in Australia, the pastor would simply do two rounds, one with the plate and then with the chalice. In the 1973 hymnbook, the instructions say: "*When the Minister gives the bread, he says...*" "*When the Minister gives the cup, he says...*"<sup>31</sup> But then only 14 years later in 1987, when the Supplement was published, the words were changed: "*When the minister and his assistants give the bread and the cup, they say...*"<sup>32</sup> The older practice was changed sometime in between. I don't think the change came about because of malice, but just out of ignorance.

However, there is a practice which is used in Scandinavia, where an assistant holds the plate, the pastor takes the chalice, and then the pastor leans over and gives the bread and then the chalice. This is much quicker than the Slovakian way, and only takes a few minutes longer, especially if the pastor communes two or three people with the bread and then doubles back with the wine. People would still have enough time to peel their potatoes or whatever they do before lunch! It can also be a good thing to use retired pastors and visiting pastors to help out when they around.

When a pastor gives both kinds, as I often had to do in some small churches in my previous parish, it can actually bring about a lot of benefits. (For example, let's say someone *is* an alcoholic.

They might ask me privately to make sure I only give them a tiny sip. But if we have assistants always giving the chalice, then I have to tell all of them their secret when otherwise I could keep it to myself.) Of course, the body and blood of Christ are still the body and blood of Christ, and if we do make a change to our current practice, it's good for us to talk about it in bible studies and such like and test my opinion to see if it is actually right or not. It seems to me that our church's teaching in the Book of Concord is that the Sacrament should be received in both kinds from the hands of the pastor, because they are set aside as the **steward of God's mysteries** (1 Corinthians 4:1).



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<sup>30</sup> I was asked after preaching this sermon if our congregation should celebrate the Lord's Supper once a month rather than weekly, however this was not what I was advocating. In the Book of Concord, it states that the normal practice of Lutheran churches is to have the Lord's Supper "every Lord's Day and on other festivals" (Apology XXIV (XII) 1. McCain: 220). Also, could we imagine a Sunday gathering in the New Testament times without the "breaking of the bread"? (Acts 2:42, 20:7).

<sup>31</sup> *Lutheran Hymnal*, Authorized by the Lutheran Church of Australia, Word edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1973, p14.

<sup>32</sup> *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Melody line edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p20.

So—so far, we've talked about the *consecration* and the *distribution*. The last thing: the *reception*. Of course, this is simply the other side of the coin from the distribution.

But there's a question: who should receive the Lord's Supper? You might remember from our sermon last week about how the Lord's Supper can be received to our blessing or to our judgment<sup>33</sup>. As pastors, we want to make sure that people who come know what the sacrament is and what it's for. People should believe that it is the body and blood of Christ, and that it is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. If people don't believe that, they shouldn't be given the Lord's Supper. This is not because we don't think these people are Christians, or because we don't love them. No—far from it! We love these people, and we don't want them to receive the sacrament to their judgment. Especially, the Lord's Supper should not be given to someone who is not baptised, or is not a Christian. We want these people to be taught our church's teaching, and be welcomed to the Lord's Supper publicly and properly. It was always the teaching of the Lutheran Church that the Lord's Supper should not be given to people who don't believe in the Lord's Supper. And those who receive it should be *examined and absolved*<sup>34</sup>. They should be taught about it. This is what pastoral care is—it treats God's real things as real, and teaches people how to enter into the presence of our living Lord Jesus. Our common faith in the real presence of Christ's body and blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins is what makes us a church, and binds us together in Christian love<sup>35</sup>. As I said last week, there's only one kind of unworthy guest to the Lord's Supper, and that is a person who does not believe. I would like to commend it to you how we as a congregation can best build each other up in a good practice and strengthen our mission in this area, so that people can be welcomed to the Lord's Supper with good teaching, and with Christian love.

We should also remember St Paul's words: **For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.** When you come to the altar, this is where you proclaim your faith. As a pastor, I have the privilege of proclaiming my faith in the pulpit, but you get that wonderful privilege at the altar. So, when we come to the altar, we come on our knees as a united church. It's not consistent to be also taking communion in another church where the beliefs about various things are different. We can't make two conflicting confessions of faith. It's inconsistent to commune at one church where we teach that we are saved by grace, and commune at

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<sup>33</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11:27: "Whoever, therefore, eat the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord."

<sup>34</sup> "No one is admitted to the Sacrament without first being examined. The people are also advised about the dignity of the Sacrament, about how it brings great consolation to anxious consciences, so that they too may learn to believe God and to expect and ask from Him all that is god. This worship pleases God." (Augsburg Confession XXIV 6—8. McCain: 47—48.) "The Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved." (Apology XXIV 1. McCain: 220).

<sup>35</sup> "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for well partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

another where they teach salvation by works. That would be a bit like being married to two people!

So let's read together what Luther says in the Catechism about receiving the Lord's Supper.

*Who receives this sacrament worthily?*

***Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."***

***But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.***

Can you see? A person's worthiness doesn't come from themselves, but from the words, and from the faith in the words: **Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.** Sometimes people might also fast on a Sunday morning, and there's an old custom which is still practised among many Christians throughout the world of skipping breakfast on a Sunday morning, so that the first thing you eat and drink for the day and the week is Christ's body and blood. You might have some bodily preparation—you might have some special Sunday clothes that you wear. All of these things are good things, but are free and people can do them if they like. But what is most important is the word of God, and the heart that believes God's word. You can also see that Luther tells us that those who don't believe in the realities of the Lord's Supper are not prepared to receive it, and shouldn't be given it.

One more thing about receiving the Lord's Supper. Often when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, there are some left-overs, and it is often asked, what exactly we should do with it. It is our church's teaching that the action of the sacrament is to consecrate, distribute and receive it<sup>36</sup>. So, if there has been some bread which is consecrated, it should be distributed

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<sup>36</sup> "To preserve this true Christian doctrine about the Holy Supper, and to avoid and abolish many idolatrous abuses and perversions of this testament, the following useful rule and standard has been derived from the words of institution: Nothing has the nature of a Sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ or apart from the action divinely instituted. This means, if Christ's institution is not kept as He appointed it, then there is no Sacrament. This is by no means to be rejected, but can and should be encouraged and maintained in God's Church. The use or action here does not mean chiefly faith. Nor does it mean the oral participation alone. It means the **entire external, visible action** of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ:

and received. The only thing that Christ has said for us to do with it is to **take and eat, take and drink.**<sup>37</sup>

In the Catholic Church, there is still a practice to keep the consecrated bread left over, and then to put it on display, for example, in a monstrance, which is a special stand to hold consecrated bread.<sup>38</sup> People then come and pray it, because, as I said two weeks ago, they believe that it isn't actually bread any more. Lutherans have always rejected this practice, because worshipping the bread like this, would be like the shepherds coming to the manger and worshipping both Christ *and the manger!* The bread is still a thing created by God, even though it is also Christ body, united to Christ's body, and is the means by which we eat Christ's body<sup>39</sup>. The early Lutherans said that this



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the consecration, or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of Christ's body and blood." (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII 85—86. McCain: 575-576. Emphasis mine)

<sup>37</sup> In the Book of Concord, there is a reference to two letters which Martin Luther sent to another pastor, called Simon Wolferinus (See Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII §87. McCain: 576). This pastor made the practice of putting left-over bread in with the unconsecrated bread and pouring the left-over wine back in the flagon. In the letters, Luther calls this a scandal. Luther writes: "Therefore we shall define the time of the sacramental action in this way: that it starts with the beginning of the [Words of Institution] and lasts until all have communicated, have emptied the chalice, have consumed the Hosts [consecrated bread], until the people have been dismissed and [the Priest] has left the altar. In this way, we shall be safe and free from the scruples and scandals of endless questions...Therefore see to it that if anything is left over of the Sacrament, either some communicants or the priest himself and his assistants receive it, so that it is not only a curate or someone else who drinks what is left over in the chalice, but that he gives it to the others who were also participants in the Body [of Christ], so that you do not appear to divide the Sacrament by a bad example or to treat the Sacramental action irreverently."

You can read the full letter at the following website:

[http://hans.blc.edu/~eteigen/Theology\\_& Church\\_History\\_files/WolferinusLetters.htm](http://hans.blc.edu/~eteigen/Theology_& Church_History_files/WolferinusLetters.htm).

Martin Chemnitz, who was one of the authors of the Formula of Concord, also wrote: "It conflicts with the words of institution when the bread which has been blessed is not distributed, not received, not eaten." (*Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol 2, CPH, St Louis, 1978, p281).

<sup>38</sup> This practice is called "Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament" in the Roman Catholic Church, and is often advertised on church signs. There is also a festival on the church calendar, called "Corpus Christi", which is often celebrated by Roman Catholics one week after Holy Trinity Sunday. "Corpus Christi" means "The body of Christ", and it is also often the custom in different places that people will have a procession in the streets, where the priest carries the consecrated bread high in a monstrance.

<sup>39</sup> These issues show most clearly the difference between the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper and the Roman Catholic doctrine ("transubstantiation"). In the Roman Catholic Church, because it is said that the bread is no longer bread, then "the bread" can be worshipped, because it is the body of Christ. In the Lutheran Church, we still acknowledge that the bread is bread, just as St Paul does (1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17 and 11:26, 27, 28), even though it is also the body of Christ. The bread is created by God, the body of Christ is not. Christ's body (even as it is present in the Sacrament) should be worshipped and adored, but not the bread, otherwise the bread would become an idol.

should not be done, because all the bread that was consecrated should be distributed and eaten<sup>40</sup>. If this is what people were doing in the Middle Ages, can you imagine what an offense it would have been if they then tipped the consecrated wine down the sink!

So what I have described is our church's teaching, and was the practice of the church in the early centuries which Luther and the early Lutherans also sought to continue. In recent times, because people believed that the body and blood of Christ were only present when people ate and drank it, they said: "Well, when the service is over, it's just bread and wine again, so we can put it back in the cupboard and pour it back in the bottle or down the sink." This is why you may have noticed that I often estimate the number of communicants and consume the leftovers after the service together with an elder or someone.

So here we have discussed the three actions of the Lord's Supper: the consecration, the distribution and the reception.

One last thing: there is one practice that makes distribution very difficult and cleaning up the left-overs very difficult and that is the use of individual glass cups<sup>41</sup>. Now, I know that this might be a very a sensitive issue for some of you, and it's not my intention to go out of my way to offend you. But there's a couple of things I'd like to say about it. Firstly, this is still Christ's blood here which you receive—it is wine that has had Christ's words of consecration spoken over them. But the churches that first began to use individual cups were churches that didn't believe in the real presence and they were using grape juice. Second, I am not aware of a single case where congregations have contracted disease from sharing a common chalice. In recent news, we have heard about berries from China giving people Hepatitis A<sup>42</sup>. But have you ever heard of something like this being passed

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<sup>40</sup> The technical name for "the left-overs" in the Lord's Supper is the "reliquiae" (pronounced "re-LEE-qui-ay"). The most thorough defence of the views of early Lutherans on this matter is written by Norwegian-American Lutheran pastor, Bjarne Wollan Teigen in his book *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, Trinity Lutheran Press, Brewster Massachusetts, 1986. There is another practice, which happens in the Lutheran Church of Australia, which is to pour the left-over wine on the ground outside and to put the bread back in the cupboard for next time. Often, the consecrated bread is not kept separate from unconsecrated bread. (See footnote 37.) The statement "The treatment of the unused consecrated elements" in the *Doctrinal statements of theologians of the Lutheran Church of Australia* also allows for this practice, as do some significant Lutheran American liturgical writers of the twentieth century, such as Paul Zeller Strodach (in *A manual on worship*, Muhlenberg Press, 1946, p108). However, I wonder if these writers had had access to Bjarne Teigen's book, whether they would be convinced by his arguments. At the end of the day, a dispute such as this needs to be solved scripturally, and the only thing Jesus said to do with his body and blood is to eat and drink it.

<sup>41</sup> For some further reading on this, you might like to look at the following articles: "Reflections on the Appropriate Vessels for Consecrating and Distributing the Precious Blood of Christ", John R Stephenson, 1995, *Logia* 4/1 (Epiphany), p11-19. "The Chalice Revisited", Marcus T Zill, 2005, *The Bride of Christ* 29/1-2, p10-29. "A pastoral letter—"The common cup", 1997, Thomas Winger. (This was a parish publication—if you want a copy, let me know.)

<sup>42</sup> See the article from the Australian Health Department:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/ohp-hep-a-frozen-berry.htm>.

around a congregation? Surely this would be in the news! But there have been different studies over the last 50 years—which you can have copies of if you’re interested<sup>43</sup>—which demonstrate that the common chalice is hygienically safe. But thirdly, remember that Jesus is the one who passed around a common chalice at the last supper and said, **do this in remembrance of me**, even though the disciples would have had their own individual cups at the table. All the passages about the Lord’s Supper say, **the cup, the cup, the cup** (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:25, 26, 27, 28). And wine has antiseptic properties. Jesus Christ is the God of the universe: He’s not going to poison us. And also, remember what I was saying last week about how it is a teaching of the bible that when we receive the Lord’s Supper to our blessing, it is not for **illness, weakness and death** (1 Corinthians 11:30), but gives us the opposite of these things: strength, health and life. Let me quote from a Lutheran pastor writing about this subject<sup>44</sup>:

Our Lord Jesus Christ has never killed a single person, never caused people to be sick and feeble. He has always done the contrary things, because His body and His blood are a healing medicine, “the medicine of immortality”, and not at risk of being contaminated and spreading epidemics. Let Christians who have a different opinion spend some time with St. Paul: **For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body [of the Lord] rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.** In the light of these earnest words of St Paul we must put aside all rationalistic “ifs” and “buts” against the medicine of immortality, the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the paten and the chalice before us at the altar and in the hand of the Apostolic ministry.

Of course, I’ve made some remarks today that would possibly raise some discussions for us, which is a good thing. And it’s not my intention to change these things overnight, without people talking and asking questions. These things shouldn’t be done by force, but should be done with teaching. And it would be right for you to be suspicious of anyone who wants to change things especially if it is something as important as the Lord’s Supper<sup>45</sup>. But the question I would also put to you is whether the things I mentioned were that way originally, and whether or not they were changed for the better.

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<sup>43</sup> In an article by Marcus T Zill, entitled “The Chalice revisited”, (*Bride of Christ*, vol XXIX, nos 1-2, p10-29), the author mentions three resources: (1) a *Bride of Christ pamphlet* which refers to the scientific work of Dr David Ho, at one time named “Man of the Year” for his AIDS research; (2) a study from the American Society of Microbiology in 1997 entitled “Holy communion is not a health risk”; and (3) a study from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 1998.

<sup>44</sup> This excerpt is from “Confessional Lutheranism: A skeleton in the closet of missions?” by Anssi Simojoki, in *Teach these things: Essay in honor of Wallace Schultz*, 2008, ed Erik Rottmann, Wild Boar Books, p126.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:1-2: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by open statements of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”

God's richest blessings to you all, and especially as we continue to come to eat and drink this wonderful supper that our Lord Jesus Christ has spread for us!

Amen.

*Lord Jesus Christ, bless us with your Holy Spirit, and lead and guide us in everything. Thank you for your supper, where you give us your body and blood to eat and to drink. Amen.*



Sermon 4  
**Holy, holy, holy**

*Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'd like to begin today with the words from Isaiah 6:

**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
The whole earth is full of his glory!**

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

As we begin the final sermon of this four part series on the Lord's Supper, I must say that doing this has been something that has filled me with such tremendous joy. It has been such a privilege for me to speak about the Lord's Supper! And I also pray that it has been a joy for you to hear and learn some more about this wonderful sacrament that we celebrate so often and which is so much at the centre of our Christian life.

We have such a wonderful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has done so much more for us than we will ever do for him. He has given his body into death for our sins. He has sacrificed his very life for us sinners. He has shed his blood as the price which pays for and atones for every single corruption and sin and failure and weakness in us that we could ever imagine.

We are so undeserving of his mercy, and yet he shows this mercy continually to us. We are all like sheep who constantly turn away and go astray to our own ways (Isaiah 53:6),



and yet Jesus, like a faithful shepherd (John 10:11), is always searching for us, always bringing us back to his Father with us on his shoulders (Luke 15:5). We are so weak, and yet Jesus is always making his **power perfect in our weakness** (2 Corinthians 12:9). He is always coming to our help and **binding up our wounds** (Psalm 147:3).

The Lord's Supper shows us the very character and the very heart of Jesus—that he wants to leave us in no doubt that we are his, that he has died for us, that he will raise us. But he doesn't want us to find our strength in our own hearts—he gives his body for us to eat and his blood for us to drink to show us that he wants to enter in, and even allow us to see him entering in, so that there can be no doubt in our minds that we are members of his body, and branches on this vine. He wants to show to us that he is in us and we are in him. On the night when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus prayed to his Father: **The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me** (John 17:22-23). Can you imagine that? Jesus says that he loves his disciples in the same way that his Father loves him. And Jesus says this right after he has given his disciples his body to eat and his blood to drink.

There is so much to be said about the Lord's Supper—if I only I could say more about it. When I am dead, I won't have preached a drop of what could be said, and even if I thought I had said everything there was to say, I would still be doing nothing but selling Jesus short. This is the **Lord's Supper** (1 Corinthians 11:20), this is the Supper that our Lord Jesus invented, and that our Lord has given to us, and that shows us the character and the heart of our Lord Jesus.

This is why St Paul says: **As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes** (1 Corinthians 11:26). This Lord's Supper will continue to the end of the world, and it will continue together with the proclaiming of his death. Where the Lord's Supper ceases, the church dies. Where the Lord's Supper continues, the church lives. We can so easily go through the book of Acts and see all those many occasions where Christians gathered together and broke the bread, as it says. What a wonderful miracle that Jesus gives us his body to eat and blood to drink, to pour into our bodies and souls his forgiveness, his life, his salvation! His body is **given for you**, and his blood is **shed for you for the forgiveness of sins**.

Now in 2 Corinthians 4, St Paul says: **He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God** (v14-15).

Last week, we spoke about the action of the Lord's Supper: the *consecration* of the bread and wine with Christ's words so that his body and blood are then present, the *distribution*

of his body and blood with the bread and wine, and then the reception of his body and blood with our mouths and with our hearts.

Today we are going to meditate on what we call the “Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper.” Part of our service, when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper is to consecrate it, to distribute it and to receive it. But as I just said before, St Paul says: **As grace extends to more and more people it may increase in thanksgiving to the glory of God** (2 Corinthians 4:15). Thanksgiving! Do you hear that? We come here to church to receive this wonderful supper! How else can we receive him than by giving thanks to him? We read: When Jesus took bread, **he gave thanks**. When he took the cup, **he gave thanks**.

An older pastor once said to me that in his retirement he was able to visit a lot of different congregations. He said that thanksgiving was often the sign of a healthy congregation. If people didn’t give thanks, he said, they often hadn’t understood the gospel yet.

And so, when we begin the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper, we say: *The Lord be with you. (And also with you.) Lift up your hearts. (We lift them up the Lord). Let us give thanks to the Lord. (For that is fitting and right.)*<sup>46</sup>

Now, the word “liturgy” is sometimes a dirty word, and sometimes we often think of a particular order of service. Sometimes we think liturgy is a *style* of worship—but it’s not. Every church has a liturgy, every church has patterns that it follows in worship. The word “liturgy” means some kind of public service that is performed on people’s behalf. For example, members of the police force perform their duties on behalf of the people of our country to maintain law and order. That’s a policeman’s “liturgy”. But liturgy in the church is something that is carried out not simply for law and order, but in order for you to receive the Gospel and the holy things of God. So the liturgy is a pastor’s public ministry to bring to you God’s life-giving word and the wonderful miracles of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And the whole church doesn’t simply sit there, staring like cows in a paddock, but we all join together particularly in giving thanks to God for his gifts. So in the service (or the liturgy) of the Lord’s Supper, God gives us his gifts, and we respond to him by giving thanks.

God’s Word and the Lord’s Supper are such wonderful things that our own hearts just simply can’t contain the thanks and the praise and the joy and the magnificence of what is going on. Sometimes we come to church and we’re feeling a bit tired, and we can day-dream and not pay too much attention. This is because our hearts are completely incapable of comprehending the wonder of God’s almighty presence and his holiness.

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<sup>46</sup> See *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Melody Line Edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p14-15.

So, if we're really going to thank God sufficiently, we're going to need some help. The word "liturgy" is not used very often in the bible, but it is used in some very significant places. One place is in Hebrews chapter 1, where it talks about the angels. It says: **Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?** (v14). Here the angels are called: **ministering spirits**. In Greek, it says: liturgising spirits, spirits who perform a liturgy. You might remember the wonderful passage in the Old Testament where Jacob has a dream and sees God's angels going up and down on a ladder from earth up to heaven and from heaven down to earth. And he says: **How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven** (Genesis 28:17). This is a bit like our humble little church: and not just St Mark's in Mt Barker, but in every little church where God's word is taught in its truth and purity and where the Sacraments are rightly administered. **How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.** A pastor simply preaches God's word. But it is God's angels who bring it to your ears and bring it into your heart. It's the *angels* who administer and distribute to you Christ's body and blood. This is *their* heavenly service that they perform for you. They come down God's ladder from heaven to you bringing you God's wonderful gifts.

But then they also help us to bring our thanksgiving and our praise back up to God. We say: *Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.* We can't even begin to thank God sufficiently without our hearts being lifted up to join in with all of God's angels. Our praises are so weak and insufficient, and so the angels have to join in and help us with all of their forces and with all of their strength. They have to fill out our ranks and strengthen our voices. And so when we sing praises to God, we say: *Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we adore and magnify your holy name, evermore praising you.*<sup>47</sup>

Do you hear those words? *Adore, magnify, praise.* In Canada, the Inuits (or Eskimos) are said to have over 50 words for snow, because their whole culture is so saturated in snow! In South Sudan, they have many different words to describe the different colours of cows, because their whole culture is saturated in cattle! In the bible, there are so many words for thanks and praise, because the bible is so saturated in God's holiness: adore, magnify, thanks, bless—the list goes on. And it goes on and on into eternity.

I'd like to read now from Isaiah 6. This is a wonderful passage, and it is sometimes read on Holy Trinity Sunday. But it is also a passage from where we get one of our songs that we sing when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. This passage is where God calls the prophet Isaiah, and he sees a wonderful vision.

**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he**

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<sup>47</sup> See *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Melody Line Edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p15.

covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: **Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory! And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: **“Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”** (Isaiah 6:1-7)

After this, we read about Isaiah being called to be a prophet (Isaiah 6:8-13). But there’s a couple of things, I’d like to point out. First, Isaiah says that he **saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up** (Isaiah 6:1). In John’s Gospel, we read: **Isaiah said these things because he saw the glory [of Jesus] and spoke [of Jesus]** (John 12:41). This is Jesus here in the vision—but before he took on a human body in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Isaiah sees something that is just completely indescribable, someone so amazing that it can’t be uttered in words. Only the hem of his robes fills the temple. In the Gospels, we read about this same wonderful Lord of ours, but now, he has taken a human body. Now we can describe him, now we can tell people what he looks like. Even now in the church, we receive this same Jesus in the Lord’s Supper.

And then Isaiah says that around the Lord Jesus were the **seraphim** (Isaiah 6:2). What’s that? Seraphim are a kind of angel, angelic creatures of God. In Hebrew, the word “seraphim” comes from the word “burning”. These are angels who are like fire: pure, holy, spirits of fire, surrounding the Almighty presence of Jesus. Psalm 104 speaks about them when it says: **His ministers [are] a flaming fire** (Psalm 104:4). And these seraphim have wings, and it says: **they flew**, but they also **covered their feet and their faces** (Isaiah 6:2). St Peter says that the Gospel is something so amazing, **things into which angels long to look** (1 Peter 1:12). Jesus is too holy for the angels even to look at.

And so, what do they do? They sing about Christ, they preach Christ, they adore Christ, and they say: **Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!** (Isaiah 6:3) This is what we also sing in church. When we sing this, we join in with these fiery spirits, these seraphim, but not just with them, but all the other living creatures that God has created, all the heavenly hosts, all the angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven. This bread and this wine are about to be the things in which Christ is going to be present in his body and blood. And not just to be present, but which he is going to give us to eat and to drink.

And just like the crowd on Palm Sunday welcoming Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, we also sing: **Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!** (Matthew 21:9)

But then, let's go back to Isaiah. We read from verse 4: **The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"**

And surely, when we come to the Lord's Supper, we resonate with what Isaiah says. **Woe is me! I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips. I am a [woman] of unclean lips.** How could Jesus give his body and blood to me? To *me!* Is it really true? Is his resurrected body really *here?* Is his purifying blood really *here?* And he is going to let me *eat and drink* it? Surely this thing is too holy for a sinner like me.

And yet, Jesus gives this holy food precisely for people like you, who need comfort, who need forgiveness, who need help, who need strength, who need salvation.

And so we read in Isaiah: **Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hands a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."** (Isaiah 6:6-7)

Here in the Lord's Supper, we don't just receive a burning coal on our lips. But we receive something very much like it. We receive the human body and blood of Christ, but just like a fiery coal, this human body of Christ is *set aflame* by his divinity so that there is one Jesus here, true man *and* true God. We don't just receive bread and wine, but bread and wine that is *caught on fire* like a burning coal by the holy and life-giving flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus. And this body and blood is given to people who know their sin and realise that they are sinners. This body and blood is not given to burn them and destroy them, but is given with the gift of forgiveness. **Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.** (Isaiah 6:6)

And so, together with the angels of God, we sing: **Holy, holy, holy!**

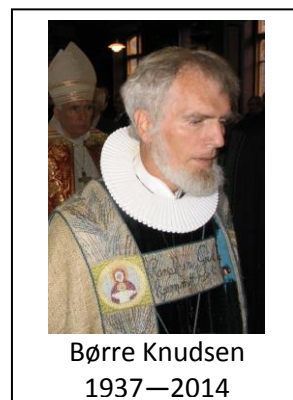
But then, back to earth for a moment—do you remember that man in the Gospels who ate bugs and honey for breakfast, and who lived in the wilderness, dressed in a shirt made out of camel's hair? This offensive, smelly guy also has a word in here. He is also singing together with the angels, together with his Lord Jesus, for whom he lost his head. Even though John's head was cut off by King Herod, the power of his preaching ministry is all in his finger. Who did John point to? He pointed to Jesus. **He must increase, said John, and I must decrease** (John 3:36). And so in the Gospels we read, where John says: **Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!** (John 1:29). And so, we also point to Jesus on the altar, in the consecrated bread and wine, and we sing: *Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Grant us your peace*<sup>48</sup>. Have mercy on

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<sup>48</sup> See *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Melody Line Edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p19.

us, Jesus, because we are sinners. Grant us your peace, Jesus, because your word of forgiveness is so much more powerful than all our sin put together.

Recently, in the last year, a Norwegian Lutheran pastor, Børre Knudsen died. He was a particularly bright light shining the gospel in Scandinavia. He was particularly persecuted because of the stand he took in favour of unborn children in Denmark. However, I saw on a documentary<sup>49</sup>, where he was nailing into some wood, and he said: *I'm not much good at nailing. I'm not much good at preaching either. I wish that my words were like nails that first of all pierced my own heart before they pierce the hearts of others.*



If only we understood our sin like that, when we came to the altar. Have mercy on us, Lamb of God! But also, if only the light which pours out from Jesus' body and blood would also pierce through us like life-giving nails that we would have such confidence and boldness and joy in the wonderful forgiveness, life and salvation that is given to us in this Supper! Grant us your peace, Lamb of God!

What a wonderful Saviour we have here who comes to feed us in the Lord's Supper! Blessed is this Lord Jesus who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.

*Dear Lord Jesus, we are not worthy that you should come under our roof, but only speak your holy and life-giving word, and we your servants shall be healed. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts! Hosanna in the Highest! Amen.*



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<sup>49</sup> The documentary is called "En preste og en plage", which translates as "A priest and a nuisance".

## Further reading

*The Small Catechism by Dr Martin Luther: 1986 Translation*, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis.

Luther's simple, straight-forward summaries are profound, rich and easy to understand. Also, in the back, there is a section called "Christian Questions with their answers prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament", which is a great resource for sharpening our faith. The Small Catechism is all part of the Book of Concord and is one of our Lutheran statements of faith.

*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A reader's edition of the Book of Concord*, ed Paul Timothy McCain, second edition, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 2006.

This is an edition of the Book of Concord, our Lutheran confession of faith, which I have cited in the footnotes in most places. Until recent times, the Book of Concord has been rather inaccessible to the average reader, but this edition has lots of explanations, historical introductions and pictures, making it an excellent resource not just for pastors and theologians, but for lay-people who want to get their teeth into some solid theological meat! One of the best over-all summaries of the Lutheran teaching on the Lord's Supper is Article VII of what is called the "Epitome of the Formula of Concord".

*Ministry, word and sacraments: An enchiridion*, Martin Chemnitz, tr Luther Poellot, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis.

This is an old book about all kinds of different church-related subjects. The section on the Lord's Supper is not too long and has lots of bible quotes to look up. Martin Chemnitz was the most prominent Lutheran theologian of his day, about 50 years after Luther.

*A comprehensive explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1610)*, Johann Gerhard, Repristination Press, Malone, Texas, 2000.

This is an old book but is so useful, and full of lots of bible quotes and has heaps of simple questions and explanations. Johann Gerhard was the most prominent Lutheran theologian of his day, about 100 years after Luther. Individual chapters would be great for bible study.

*Studies in Holy Communion*, H P Hamann, Church Development Committee, LCA, SA District, 1977.

This is a series of really great bible studies written in the 1970s by one of the seminary lecturers at that time.

*Lutheranism 101: The Lord's Supper*, Kenneth W Wieting, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 2012. [Kindle version also available]

This is a very useful resource, designed for the every-day reader. It contains material for bible studies, and is part of series of book on Lutheran teaching, which is written in the style of "The idiot's guide to..." series and the "...for Dummies" series.

There are also all kinds of useful things on the LCA website about worship in general, with some articles about the Lord's Supper, which you can find at:

<http://www.lca.org.au/biblical-and-theological-resources.html>

### **If you want something even deeper...**

*The Lord's Supper*, Martin Chemnitz, t J A O Preus, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 1979.

This is an in-depth study on the Lord's Supper by Martin Chemnitz. He also wrote a lot about the Lord's Supper in a massive work called the *Examination of the Council of Trent*, where he defended Lutheran teaching over against Roman Catholic teaching.

*This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, Hermann Sasse, Concordia Publishing House, St Louis, 2003.

Originally written in 1959, this is a classic study on the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper, written by a man who left Germany after World War II, and was a seminary lecturer in Adelaide.

*The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, Bjarne Wollan Teigen, Trinity Lutheran Press, Brewster, Massachusetts, 1986.

This is a really useful book, which especially explains how early Lutherans understood the consecration.

*The Lord's Supper*, John R Stephenson, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics vol XII, The Luther Academy, St Louis, 2003.

This is a much heavier work, written by a lecturer at the Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St Catherines, Ontario in Canada. It's a modern classic on this topic.



# Notes

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