

Sermon for A Year with the Catechism The Lord's Supper Who Receives this Sacrament Worthily?

Date: March 27, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Ezekiel 3:17-21

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:26-29, 31-32

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:21-26

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 11:26-29, 31-32

Sermon Title: Who Receives this Sacrament Worthily?



Introit: Psalm 119:98-104; Antiphon: Psalm 119:97

Hymns:

LSB 748 – I'm But a Stranger Here
LSB 746 – Through Jesus' Blood and Merit
LSB 637 – Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord
LSB 788 – Forgive Us Lord for Shallow Thankfulness
LSB 761 – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me
LSB 919 – Abide, O Dearest Jesus

Liturgy:

Divine Service of Prayer and Preaching

Songs:

Song: Broken Things
Song: Image Of God - We Are Messengers
Song: Sanctus (Holy Holy Holy)
Song: Agnus Dei (Koine)
Song: Sanctus (Holy Holy Holy)
Song: Golgotha Hill
Song: Maybe It's Ok - We Are Messengers

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: 1 Corinthians 11:26–29, 31–32

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

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Grace to you, and peace in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We've been looking at this Sacred Meal called Holy Communion. We've looked at the antiquity of this meal, handed down to Moses by God Himself. It was to be a remembrance of God's salvation from slavery to Egypt, and a view into the future when the Messiah would come. When Jesus the Messiah came, He used this same Meal to teach us to remember our freedom from slavery to sin, and to give us a view into the future when our Messiah will come again, to carry us to the true Promised Land, heaven.

Jesus gave us a promise telling us He would return when He gave us this Meal. He said:

I can guarantee that I will not drink this wine again, until that day when I drink new wine with you in My Father's kingdom.¹

That day is coming. It is not 'if' it comes, but 'when' it comes. On that day we will all enjoy this Sacred Holy Meal with all the faithful, and with Jesus the Holy Christ of God Himself, seated at the head table. On that day we will drink that fourth cup of the Passover Meal, the Cup of Restoration. The Cup that will signify for us, a life fully and whole restored to God, perfectly and forever.

Just ponder that for a moment. What a wonder that day will be. That day when all sin, all pain, all stress and strife will be what we leave behind. From that very day forward trouble will be at its very best only a distant memory, of a distant land, where we will never have to set foot again. Just ponder that for a moment. How can you not get excited?

If you really grasp what that is all about, it should return to you those same emotions you had as a child anticipating Christmas Day, when the gifts were opened. The Last Day will be for us a day when the gifts of God are opened to us. Beginning with a Meal and an introduction to your new home.²

We also looked at how we can know all of this. We looked into the Sacred Scriptures, the Holy Word of Almighty God. There we read His promises and see God always keeps His promises. We have that assurance, that guarantee, from God Himself. Not only did He make those promises to Adam and Eve,³ but to everyone down through the countless generations to us, and to those who will come after us.

1 Matthew 26:29

2 John 14:1-3

3 Genesis 3:15

That is why it is so important we teach our children.⁴ So they will follow us to our heavenly home.

Last week we explored how a meal of bread and wine can do so much. Of course it can't, but God can, and He does these things through this Meal. So what question remains? What is left to learn? What else is there in which to dig concerning this Meal of all meals?

There are those words of God, upon which we don't focus very much, concerning this Meal:

Whoever eats the bread or drinks from the Lord's Cup in an improper way will be held responsible for the Lord's Body and Blood.

Anyone who eats and drinks [*in an improper way*] is eating and drinking a judgment against himself when he does not recognize the Lord's Body.⁵

We often explore and read about the many promises that come with this Meal, and those promises, those blessings, are true and sure. So are the curses, and the warnings. You can also be just as certain God's Word is true and sure when it comes to those who take this Meal in an improper way. If we will believe and cling to God's Word when it promises us blessings, should we not also cling to it, just as desperately, when it warns us of danger? Danger that we can avoid if we listen to God's Word.

There are two levels of responsibility here. One is the responsibility we have for ourselves, ensuring we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest God's Holy Word, and apply ourselves to applying it to our lives. If you reject God's Word, God's Word gives a grave warning. God's Word says:

If we go on sinning after we have learned the truth, no sacrifice can take away our sins. All that is left is a terrifying wait for judgment, and a raging fire that will consume God's enemies.⁶

Please do not reject God's promises, God's compassion and God's salvation for your soul. That is one of the responsibilities that exists here.

4 Deuteronomy 6:7-9

5 1 Corinthians 11:27,29

6 Hebrews 10:26-27

The other is the responsibility God has placed on me as your shepherd.⁷ Do you remember, from the Old Testament reading, what God's Word said about me?

I have made you a watchman over the people...

Listen to what I say, and warn them for me...

Suppose you warn the wicked people, and they don't turn from their wicked ways. Then they will die because of their sin, but you will save yourself...

If you don't warn them, they will die because of their sin... I will hold you responsible for their deaths.⁸

Those are serious, powerful and intimidating words, are they not? My question to you is should I take them seriously? Assuming you think I should, what does that mean? Looking to the Gospel lesson Jesus says:

Whoever calls another believer an insulting name will answer for it in the highest court. Whoever calls another believer a fool will answer for it in hellfire.⁹

Does God take sin seriously? It would appear He does. Is He patient with us when we sin in ignorance? It would seem He is. Is that an excuse to remain purposefully naive? No. God commands us to study His Word and make it a part of our lives.¹⁰ Refusing to do that is just as sinful as purposefully committing any sin against God. We should desire to do the right thing.

So all of this culminates in the practice of our church to limit who may come to the Table of the Lord. Before going to the seminary, that practice was for me a very confusing one, which I did not understand. It, quite frankly, made no sense to me that this Sacred Meal, which Jesus gave to bring us together, Holy Communion, would be used by anyone to tear us apart.

As I mentioned in the first sermon in this series I went to the seminary with lots of questions. Questions to which I was determined to get an answer that made sense. I had often been told what we do, but I had never been given an answer explaining why we do it; explaining it in light of our understanding of what Christ taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Read through the Gospels some time. Look at how Jesus acted toward sinful people. Show me where He displayed contempt and exclusion toward them. Show

⁷ 'Pastor' is a Latin word that means: Shepherd.

⁸ Ezekiel 3:17-20

⁹ Matthew 5:22

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 11:18-21

me where He pushed people out and keeps them away. You will find such things. Jesus did do those things. However look at to whom He directed such rhetoric. I think this is important. Jesus displayed His contempt only toward those who should know better.¹¹

He sat down to eat with and to teach: prostitutes, thieves, traitors, liars and every other type outcast in society. The list of times when Jesus patiently takes people in, no matter where they were, and teaches them the truths of God's love and the wonderful gift of real forgiveness; the list of times Jesus does that is long indeed.

When do you see Jesus judging and casting out sinful people? When do you see Jesus excluding people from forgiveness and God's blessings? It does happen.¹² It is always directed at those who should know better.¹³ They are the ones who felt Jesus' judgment.

I recall a time when I visited a church, this was long before I went to the seminary, I was at a church of a different denomination, and I thought our two synods were in fellowship with each other, so I asked the pastor of that church if I could attend the Lord's Supper that day. His response was, "Of course not!" Then he turned his back and walked away. I was left wondering if it was okay to join them at all. He made it clear I was not welcome at all.

The truth is I've seen LC-MS pastors do similar things. Where does Jesus act like that? Like I said before I had often been told what we do, but I had never been given an answer that explained why we do it. Certainly not one that fit into my understanding of what Jesus taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus teaches us to do everything in Christian love.¹⁴ When I approached that pastor was I treated with Christian love? You know there are many, in other denominations, who do teach that we in the LC-MS are hyper-judgmental, exclusionary and elitists who think we're better than everybody else.

That just adds to the problem because some of our own pastors have been unkind, and then the problem is compounded by those who break the commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."¹⁵ (*Like we heard just last Wednesday in our Lenten service.*) So we end up with a lot going against us.

11 Matthew 23:13-36

12 Matthew 23:13-36

13 The Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious leaders.

14 Matthew 22:36-40

15 Exodus 20:16

To fix this we have some options:

One is to just tell everyone to come up and enjoy the Meal. Many do that thinking they will be perceived as more welcoming. In the short term they might, but what about all those serious warnings in God's Word? Their actions teach their belief. They don't believe God says what He means. They teach God's warnings, and God's Word, are a joke.

Another option is to exclude everyone. Limit this Meal to members of our congregation alone. I know some pastors who do that. My problem with both of those options is they fail to display very true and real Christian love.

So what do I think we should do? I think we should display very true and real Christian love. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁶ So how should we want to be treated?

Let's step aside from that question for a moment and ask another one. Do you, as parents, make rules for your children? Assuming you do, why? Why do you make rules in your house? Is it because you don't like your kids and you want to keep them from good things? Why do you make rules? You make rules to protect them from things they are not yet ready to handle, or from things that would cause them harm. In your house that might include when you can drive the car or use the oven. You make rules about these things because you want to protect your children from harm; because you want good things for them, not bad. They may not always understand the rules, but the rules are still good for them.

So why does God make rules? He makes rules to protect us from things we are not yet ready to handle or to keep us from things that would cause us harm. Can this Meal bring harm to people? God Word says it can. If it can, how should we handle this Meal? We should act under the direction of Jesus to: "Love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁷

If you were going to do something unknowingly, something that would cause you harm, would you not want someone to tell you, before you did it? If you were about to drink something that would unknowingly poison you, wouldn't you want someone to stop you? ...or would you rather they just sit back, not judge you, and let you get sick and die?¹⁸

The reason we would hold people back from this Meal is not to be elitists or exclusionary. If it is done properly it is always done under the umbrella of Christian love for our neighbor, to ensure all that we do here is solely and only for

16 Matthew 22:39

17 Matthew 22:39

18 1 Corinthians 11:30

their good. We should care enough about each, and everyone's soul, that we are bold enough to speak up and not let them come to harm; not let them fall under God's judgment. That is why we do what we do.

So how do we get past our own past sins and other's false accusations. As I have gone over these things, in the past, the appeal to me is always: teach more. We need to find ways to teach the visitors who come to our house that we love them enough to really care for them; to really care for their souls and salvation.

We must show them we respect them enough that we would want to ensure only the best for them. We need to convey these things, out loud and on purpose. We need to make a very purposeful effort to convey that clearly, because there are so many who, unfairly and untruthfully, teach other things about us.

The purpose of that document in those pew pockets was never to be a statement put on display to keep people out. The title I put on that document is: "An invitation to commune with us." It is just that: An invitation! The purpose of that document was to help you invite your friends and family to come to the Table. That invitation, however, needs to be given understanding the warning Scripture gives. That document was written to help you show Christian love, not: hate, arrogance, exclusivity or exclusion.

What should be in those pew pockets is a document explaining how people can connect to our church in: services, events and opportunities to be a part of this family of God with us.

We want more to come forward to this Meal not less. We want that unity and common bond, (a very intimate and special bond we share with our God), with them. Our goal is not to exclude them, but rather to fully include them. To include them not only in joining us at the altar, but joining us in the blessings and promises of God; the assurances of salvation we find here.

We must want to include them in the peace that is found when leaving this altar fully forgiven, with all doubts cast aside.

That is what we want for them, just as it is what we want for ourselves.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

