

5 August 2018

Bread and Wine, Body and Blood, For You

Text: John 6:22-35

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:35).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bread and wine. Two physical things. Things most of us probably eat or drink several times a week. In fact, across the world right now, there are probably people who are eating bread and drinking wine in some capacity at this very moment. And there are several types of bread and wine. There are even things you can garnish the bread with that adds to the eating experience.

Now I am not going to go into detail about all the different types of breads and wines that are out there for a few reasons. First, I don't know enough about them. Second, to do so would take up more time than is necessary. And lastly, it's not necessary to look at all that information because it doesn't have much to do with our text from the Gospel According to St. John this morning.

But there is one thing about bread and wine that I will say and that is that it is necessary. It is necessary because it gives us something to eat so that we will not go hungry and it gives us something to drink so that we may not go thirsty. Bread and wine does that. It fills you up. It nourishes you. It helps you to sustain life.

And there is one more thing that bread and wine does for you, at least, as spiritual daily bread, and that is that bread and wine give you life. Not only does it give you life but this bread and wine, given to you and for you, also, saves you. Meaning it is a physical meal of eternal importance.

How can I say that? How is it that pastor can say that simple bread and wine saves, forgives sin, and is of eternal importance? Simply put, I can speak these words to you because they are the words of, as verse 35 our text this morning says, they are the words of the bread of life and the living water Himself. They are the words of Jesus. That is His promise for you.

As Lutherans, we believe, teach, and confess as the early Christian church did, that the bread and wine alone do nothing. They are just simply bread and wine. But, as it is with the waters of Holy Baptism, when God's Word, when the Word, is combined with the

bread and wine, then we also believe, teach, and confess as the early Christian church did, that Holy Communion, that bread and wine of our Lord does in fact save you. It saves you because it is God's work alone that saves us, not ours. Holy Communion saves us, not because we wish it so or because your pastor says it does, but rather because Scripture alone tells us it does.

The Gospels According to Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul writes of the promise that Holy Communion saves you. You hear that promise a lot from your pastor, as you should from your shepherd, particularly on the first and third Sunday's when we celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar, or Holy Communion. And you will hear it again in a few minutes. Listen to these words that our Lord spoke on Maundy Thursday, the night in which He was betrayed. Listen to His promise that this meal of life, with life giving bread and wine, saves you.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said: 'Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me.' In the same way also He took the cup after supper and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

"For you, for the forgiveness of sins." This meal, for you. This bread, the bread of life from the Bread of Life, for you. This drink, this wine, for you. For the forgiveness of all your sins. For you.

As Lutherans we also believe, teach, and confess that the bread IS Christ's body. The wine IS Christ's blood because Jesus says it is. 500 years ago at a meeting between two reformers, Martin Luther met with Ulrich Zwingli at a Colloquy in Marburg. The reason for the meeting is because the Holy Roman emperor, Charles V, needed Christian unity so as to help in his war against the Turks. So this colloquy was called, and Luther and Zwingli looked at 15 points of the Christian faith that Charles hoped they would agree on. They were points that the Roman Catholic church agreed on for the most part and now Charles needed these two leading reformers to agree as well. And they did, on all points but the last one on Holy Communion. Zwingli believed that while these are the words that Christ spoke, that Communion was a symbol of what Christ did. Or in other words, that the small little word "is" really didn't mean "is". Luther, upon hearing this grabbed a piece of chalk and wrote in big letters across the table the Latin words, "Hoc Est meum corpus", meaning, "This is my body". And he underlined repeatedly the little

three letter word "Est". Luther said, this IS truly the body and blood of Jesus because Jesus said it is. It is not a symbol, nor does it represent, Christ true body and blood, but the bread and wine, with the Word of the Lord, is indeed what Jesus said it was, His true body, His true blood. And whoever eats this bread and drinks this blood will never go hungry or thirst again.

How wonderful is our Lord's great love for us that He would give you such a gift. His best gift, given to save you right there on that altar.

Sadly, some who eat His body and drink His blood, do so unworthily and to their own condemnation. Our catechism says this about how a person drinks unworthily, **"The Sacrament of the Altar (Holy Communion) is not our supper, but the Lord's Supper, where He gives us His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. To eat and drink the Lord's body and blood without trust in His words, however, is to eat and drink judgment on oneself."** (Small Catechism, 2017 ed., page 339). St. Paul writes the same in his first letter to the church in Corinth, **"Whoever, therefore, 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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."** (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).

Who are the unworthy and unprepared that St. Paul writes about? Again, the Catechism gives us our answer, **"We are unworthy and unprepared when we do not believe Christ's words, or doubt them, since the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe"**. (Small Catechism, 2017 ed., page 339).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you worthy and prepared to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you believe the words of our Lord that this "IS" His body, this "IS" is blood? Do you have doubts in our Lord's promise of life for you? If you aren't worthy and prepared, then repent and believe. Confess your sins to your heavenly Father and receive His promise of absolution for you, His free gift, paid for by His son on the cross, so that your sins may be forgiven, so that you will be indeed worthy, and so that you have new life in Him.

And if you are worthy and prepared, if you believe, by faith, not of your own doing, but of the faith created and sustained in you by the Holy Spirit, then come, and kneel at the foot of the cross and receive from the God who loves you, the Bread of Life and the Living Water. Come and eat. Come and drink. Come hungry, leave filled. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

