

Messiah Messenger

Volume 2 Issue 1 – Lent 2011

Life Together in Confession and Absolution

In the last *Messiah Messenger*, I wrote to you about a Biblical word *koinonia*, which means life together or fellowship. I wrote how we have fellowship with one another through Baptism. This issue, I would like to write about how through Confession and Absolution we have fellowship.

In his book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a Lutheran Pastor in Nazi Germany, who was eventually put to death for taking part in a failed assassination attempt on Hitler) wrote: “The *pious* fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous.” How often do we treat church like a place where only the perfect go? This is the “*pious fellowship*” that Bonhoeffer spoke of. It is putting on the “church face”, even though we have a lot of hurt, sorrow, guilt, and shame buried down on the inside.

Confession – and I mean the kind where you confess your sins out loud to another person, be it the person you offended or to a pastor – forces us to take off this mask and face another human being as a sinner. It can be scary or downright embarrassing... or so we think. But it is in confessing our sins to one another that this fellowship begins to occur.

Bonhoeffer continued and wrote, “sin demands to have a man by himself.” However, when there is confession, we find that we are in good company. This is not just because we then find we are standing among sinners, but because in the Absolution that follows, we find Christ in His Word.

That’s the thing, Jesus in His ministry went out of His way to be amongst sinners... sinners like you and me. In Confession, Jesus is present hearing our sins and speaking forgiveness.

Martin Luther wrote that ear of a pastor is a tomb. What a pastor hears in private confession dies right there. The reason for this is because the pastor stands “in the stead” of Christ, and so the reality is that it is Christ who hears our confession. Also, I made a promise in my ordination that I would not divulge the sins confessed to me. Then when I speak the words of absolution... you can be sure they are as true as if Christ Himself were speaking them to you.

As we journey through this season of Lent, I would encourage you to make use of this gift that Jesus gives to you in private confession and absolution with me. This is not because I have a curiosuty about particular sins, but because I know the relief that comes when I confess a sin out loud to my confessor and hear him forgive me of my sins. Then there can be no doubt! If I start to question if I am forgiven for a particularly troubling sin, I can remember, “ah Pastor ____ said, ‘I forgive you of all your sins’ and because he speaks ‘in the stead and by the command of Jesus Christ,’ I can be as sure of this forgiveness as if Jesus himself were speaking it to me.”

So how does one go about this? Well, in our hymnal we have an order on page 292. It is a good guide if this is a new experience for you. I am available at any time for this, but I do set aside time to be available before our services on Wednesday and on Sunday.

In Christ,

Pastor Lorfeld



Moving to Every Sunday Communion

At our voter's body meeting next week, I would like to hear your feedback on moving to every Sunday Communion. Over the next weeks I invite you to think about this move, to discuss it, and share your thoughts and concerns with me (or you can save them for the voter's body meeting). To be clear, moving to every Sunday Communion is something that needs to be a pastoral decision, but in order for me to make that decision, I need to know your thoughts. In order to help us as a congregation think through this, I have put together some questions and answers.

Q: Why would the church desire to have celebrate the Lord's Supper in the Divine Service each Sunday?

A: Since in the Lord's Supper we receive our Lord Jesus' very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins it is a great gift to us and is central to the Divine Service. The holy Christian church through out the ages has identified the Lord's Day (Sunday) with the Lord's Supper. As such the Lord's Supper was never viewed as an occasional extra or as somehow not as important as the other means of grace (Word, Absolution, Holy Baptism). In the Supper the Church, the Bride of Christ, sees herself clearly as the Body of Christ, being "one flesh" with Christ Jesus -- a great mystery indeed (Ephesians 5). The Supper is our Lord's last will and testament where we receive His life-giving mercy.

Also, since each day and each week we are in need of the Lord's forgiveness and strength, we are therefore in need of the Lord's Supper much in every way. Today, our increasingly less and less Christianly influenced culture threatens our faith daily, along with the help of Satan and our own sinful desires (old Adam). In the Christian Questions and Answers in the Small Catechism Luther writes the following, admonishing us to frequently receive the gift of Communion:

"What should admonish and incite a Christian to receive the sacrament frequently? In respect to God, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord should move him, and in respect to himself, the trouble that lies heavy on him, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given."

Q: Is there a Scriptural basis for this?

A: All of our discussion must begin with God's Word. When Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, He gives the command "Do this as **often** as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:25) Note that Jesus connects the Lord's Supper to His remembrance: that is the proclamation of the Gospel. Also we are given the example of the Church in Acts 2:42 "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** and the prayers". We can also conclude from verse 46, that this was not just weekly, but daily reception of the Lord's Supper. So while Scripture makes no rule that Christians must receive the Lord's Supper every day or every week, we have the expectation that it is offered "often" and to be the norm when the Church gathers for worship.

Q: What do the Lutheran Confessions have to say?

[In the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, we confess that the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord are true because they are a true exposition of Holy Scripture. It is for this reason that we promise that all doctrine and practice is to be in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions.]

A: In the introduction to the Small Catechism, Luther writes: “For Christ did not say, ‘Leave this out, or, despise this,’ but, ‘Do this, as often as you drink it’ [1 Corinthians 11:25], and other such words. Truly, He wants it done, and not entirely neglected and despised. ‘Do this,’ He says.”

Also in the Defense of the Augsburg Confession: “At the outset, we must again make this preliminary statement: we do not abolish the Mass, but religiously keep and defend it. *Masses are celebrated among us every Lord's Day and on the other festivals. The Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it*, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments, and other such things.”

Q: How then has it become the practice in America to have the Lord's Supper once or twice a month?

A: The history behind infrequent reception of the Lord's Supper has many origins. The first is due to the fact that in pioneer days, congregations would have the Lord's Supper only when they could get a pastor, which was often only once a month, or even less. Another source is a movement called “Pietism” which downplayed the importance of the Sacraments and put an emphasis on the subjective “feelings” that an individual has towards their faith.

Q: Has our Synod said anything concerning the frequency of communion?

A: Yes, the 1995 Convention of the LCMS passed the following resolution:

To Encourage Every Sunday Communion

RESOLUTION 2-08A

Overture 2-51 (CW, pp.149-150)

Whereas, the opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day was a reality cherished by Luther and set forth clearly with high esteem by our Lutheran Confessions (Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and of the Apology); and

Whereas, our synod's 1983 CTCR document on the Lord's Supper (p.28) and our Synod's 1986 [1991] translation of Luther's Catechism both remind us that the Scriptures place the Lord's Supper at the center of worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20,23), and not as an appendage or an occasional extra; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in convention encourage its pastors and congregations to study the scriptural, confessional, and historical witness to every Sunday communion with a view toward recovering the opportunity for receiving the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day.

Action: Adopted.

Q: Does this mean that every congregation member MUST receive the Lord's Supper every Sunday?

A: **No.** We must see the Lord's Supper as a gift freely given, not a new law which we must follow in order to be a Christian. With that said, the Christian grows in his or her appreciation for this gift because of the gift itself and our deep need for this gift. We are sinners, all of us, and so long as that remains true we have need of forgiveness which is exactly the gift that is given in Christ's Body and Blood that we eat and drink.

Q: If I see someone not receiving the Lord's Supper what should I think?

A: We should do as the 8th commandment says (using the old language), "put the best construction on everything". We should not assume anything other than that this person, in their freedom, is not choosing to receive the Lord's Supper on this day. Resist the temptation to think beyond that.

Q: But won't having the Lord's Supper more often make it less special?

A: It is not our own subjective feeling that makes the Lord's Supper special, but rather it is that which is given: Christ's Body and Blood; and the promise: the forgiveness of sins; that makes the Lord's Supper special. My own personal experience is that as a Seminarian where I received the Lord's Supper two and even three times a week, was that it became an even greater treasure the more I received it.

Q: Why won't we be voting on this move?

A: As I mentioned in the introduction, this is a pastoral decision because it is a matter of doctrine and practice. With these decisions, pastor will consult the elders and if a decision to make this move happens, it will be done carefully, even with respect to those that may not be ready for it yet. Therefore, in consideration of the *whole* congregation (not merely a simple majority vote) we will move when pastor, in consultation with the elders, believes we are ready for it.

Q: When would we be implementing this change?

A: Much depends on your response and the readiness of the whole congregation, but tentatively beginning Easter of this year.

Q: What about visitors?

A: In line with our Synod's and the Historic Church's practice of closed communion, we welcome those who are members of congregations with whom we are in fellowship with (other LCMS congregations and congregations of sister/partner churches). To visitors who are members of other confessions of faith, it is our practice to gently explain this practice, to encourage the importance of learning what we believe concerning the Sacrament, and to share a common confession. Therefore our response is not simply a "no", but rather "not yet".