

Fellow witnesses of the risen and ascended Christ, we continue to hear the words of Martin Luther from the Small Catechism. Please turn in the folders in your pews to the Sixth Chief Part, the Sacrament of the Altar, which is Communion, the Lord's Supper. We will recite together the meanings of the questions: *What is the benefit of this eating and drinking? How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?* and *Who receives the Sacrament worthily?* These words will guide our meditation this morning.

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.

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."

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.

With these words we believe that Jesus has given His body and shed His blood, fruits for us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. Give thanks, that by the power of the Holy Ghost, we have been given the fruit of faith. The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin, removes all filth from us and makes us clean to stand before God in righteousness and purity forever. We are saved by the grace of God alone.

Jesus' words of promise have put abundant gifts into the Sacrament of the Altar, and we receive these fruits in faith every time we gather together, humbling ourselves before the

altar of God. Truly our cup runs over, goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Beware of false prophets, pastors who do not uphold and encourage regular reception of the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins, they desire our destruction; they are ravenous wolves leading sheep to the slaughter.

With the words of Jesus, we believe that when we eat and drink of Jesus' body and blood, as we do in the Sacrament of the Altar, our sins are forgiven? We do indeed fear, love and trust in God above all things; just as our heavenly Father loves us and gave His only begotten Son up unto death for us. For whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup that Jesus gives us, we proclaim His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven until He comes again to take us to be where He is. Every time we gather to hear the Word of God in all of its truth and purity and receive the Sacrament as He instituted it, we are making witness to all people that Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus Christ is the spotless Lamb of God who was slain to shed His blood, as a once and for all perfect sacrifice, to take away the sins of the world. The pastors, the true under-shepherds, who encourage the Lord's Supper in this way within his congregation, produces good fruit among the flock.

We believe that when we have received the forgiveness of sins, as we do in the Sacrament of the Altar, at the same time we also receive the good fruits of life and eternal salvation. The Lord's Supper now saves us. God the Father has showered the richness of His mercy upon us. This is the good fruit of faith that is produced in those who eagerly receive the Sacrament with gladness.

The Sacrament of the Altar is truly beneficial it is truly a most precious gift. We must never regard the Sacrament of the Altar as a harmful thing from which to flee or avoid. It

should be regarded as pure and wholesome, a soothing medicine which aids and nourishes us in both body and soul, giving us life and salvation before God in heaven. For where the soul is healed, as it is with the forgiveness of sins, the body is also greatly benefited, strengthened and built up, producing good fruit in us.

In the Sacrament of the Altar Jesus Christ gives us victory over sin, death and the power of hell and strength for a new life in Him. If Christ is in us, as He is when we eat and drink of Him in the Sacrament, we are alive forever righteousness sake. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for we shall be filled, as we are in the Sacrament of the Altar. Blessed are those who have believed what the Lord has said to us, it will be accomplished. Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it, hold it sacred, trust in it, gladly hear it and learn it. Blessed are you and me and all people who have Jesus Christ physically present in us as is the case in the Lord's Supper; and blessed is that pastor who eagerly offers it to the sheep. Truly good fruits are produced by our very participation in it.

On the front of your bulletin this morning is an icon known as the "Vine and the Branches" The image depicts Jesus Christ as the Tree of Life, with His Twelve Disciples, His first pastors, as the branches, "branching out" to spread the Gospel to the four corners of the world. Jesus Christ is at the center, He alone is the Tree of Life, the True Vine, from which all forgiveness, life and eternal salvation comes. We must be grafted and joined to Him or we die. Jesus, the Word made flesh, has called His pastors, His disciples, to preach the Gospel in all its truth and purity. He has commanded them to baptize all nations, proclaim peace to all people and feed the multitudes, taking compassion upon them, that they would be joined with Him in a loving and perfect relationship forever.

In our Gospel lesson this morning we hear the words of Jesus, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven." We need to let these words have their way with us, let them sink in. The prevailing view of God's word is that it is old and out of date; that it does not speak to us today, that it is full of errors. The common view of the Lord's Supper is that it is just a meal that all people enjoy together, just like the disciples did in the upper room, nothing special. The common view of forgiveness is that it is cheap grace, and that either everyone can have it or no one needs it. Those thoughts are lies promoted by false prophets. But the true servants of the Word, faithful pastors, remind us of God's Word which proclaims, "We must receive the Sacrament of the Altar worthily, because whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." We receive the Sacrament of the Altar worthily when we have faith in Christ and trust in His Holy Word and Promise. Pastors who hold this truth of Jesus Christ before our eyes will produce much good fruit among us, our faith in Christ will be strengthened.

And notice this: those who are saved, who are entering into the kingdom of heaven, are not saved because they cry out, "Lord, Lord." We are not saved because we speak or do anything at all. We are not even saved because we believe the right thing. We are saved because we listen. We are saved because we hear. We are saved because we receive. We are saved by Our Lord saying to us, "You are forgiven. Take, eat. Go in peace." We are not saved because of what we have done, prophesying, casting out demons, or performing other

wonders. We are saved because we do anything. We do not save ourselves, we are saved by Jesus Christ who came down from heaven, was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Jesus does not save us because we cry out "Lord, Lord," Jesus saves us because we listen to His Word preached and taught, because we receive His Sacraments. Jesus saves us because we fear love and trust in Him above all things. We do not cry not, "Lord, Lord, look what I have done," but we cry out, "Lord have mercy on me!"

Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. He has declared us righteous. The loving relationship the Father wants to have with us has been restored in His Son Jesus. We are forgiven, not for any merit or worthiness in us; but by His Fatherly, Divine mercy and goodness alone. Through His body and blood, Jesus has established and continues to nourish our faith in Him; that we would trust in what He has done and continues to do for us. By this precious gift of his Supper, Jesus pardons our sins, removes our guilt, and welcomes us into eternal fellowship with Him. This is the good fruit that Jesus produces in us and among us. Thanks be to God that it is so. Amen.