**Divine Service Part I – Preparation:**

**Confession & Absolution**

Trinity XVIII – 10.16.2022

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

Today’s message is more like a Bible Study. It is good for us to look at the Divine Service and why we worship as we do. Sometimes we have done a narrative Divine Service where I would explain a portion of the service and then we do it.

Today we are going to look at the first portion of the Divine Service and why we do what we do. I pray that you will develop an even deeper appreciation of what we do during the service, and see it as the rich blessing from God that it truly is.

First, we must remember that this is the Divine Service – or as it was in German – Gottesdienst. It is not our doing, nor our work for God, but it is first His work for us and to us – only then do we respond. Furthermore, our responses are only His Word of promise to us – found in Scripture – repeated back to Him.

Our hymn does not really begin the service, it is more a prelude to it – if you consider the hymn text, you will see that it reflects either the theology of the invocation or begins to set the theme of the day which is based upon the Scripture lessons appointed for that Sunday of the Church year.

Whose house are we in this morning? It is not ***OUR*** church – it isGod’s house! We are gathered together for the family meal at His request and invitation. We are gathered to receive wonderful gifts from Him.

God’s name; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the use of the sign of the holy cross, were first spoken and used upon each of us in our baptism. The Invocation confesses that this God calls His people together. It is His name we share – we are His family in Christ.

This confession is confused when good-intentioned ministers pervert the invocation by adding the words, “We make our beginning” to the name of God. It is God who begins a good work in us, not we in ourselves.

We come together not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done to us. He calls us through His Holy Spirit. It is ***His*** Spirit which calls us, gathers us together, and enlightens us with His holy gifts. It is ***His*** Spirit which keeps us in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who works faith in us as we hear the Word of Christ and receive Christ’s body and blood. It is by these gifts we are granted forgiveness, covered in the holiness and purity of Christ, and whereby His righteousness becomes ours.

When we gather together then, while we pray that non-Christians might join us so that they might hear of the wonderful works of God, our gathering together for corporate worship is primarily a family gathering.

You and I have been united to Christ, we are one body with Him, joined to our Lord by the Holy Spirit’s work in a miracle called baptism. Daily we live in that baptismal grace – buried with Christ and raised with Him as a new creation in Him. Each time those words are spoken, we remember that God called us by name with those words, and made us His own.

Following the invocation, we prepare for the Confession and Absolution. No matter how olde we get, when you come home, what do moms tell you as you come into the house? “Take off your shoes!” Or at the very least, “Wipe your feet!” When the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to look (at the burning bush), God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

You are family gathered in your Father’s house. You are on holy ground! You cannot sit at the dinner table filthy and unclean. So, it is time to remove that which is most filthy.

When there were no paved roads or cement sidewalks, walking was a dusty undertaking. The filthiest part of a person was their feet. So, when visitors came, someone washed their feet. Jesus washed His disciple’s feet on Holy Thursday before He instituted the Lord’s Supper.

Our baptismal life is one of daily contrition and repentance; a life of daily sorrow over our sins, a desire to amend our sinful life, and trust that in Christ Jesus our sins are forgiven – totally and completely gone.

The posture of God’s people has always been one of understanding our helplessness in our sinfulness. It is why we quote the Psalmist’s confession, our great need to be helped by God, and confession of our transgressions to be forgiven as we come into God’s house.

We gather knowing our need for continual repentance. John’s first letter begins in understanding the importance of confession and absolution. *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:8-9)

This is why Jesus promises to give those whom He sends in His name the authority to forgive sins. Do you remember the scene? Jesus asked His disciple who the people thought He was. They informed Him that they thought He was John, risen from the dead, or one of the prophets returned. *Then He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”* (Matt. 16:15-19)

That confession of the Christ, who came to purchase forgiveness, is the rock upon which Christ’s Church is built. The authority to forgive and retain sins was purchased when Christ gave His perfect and holy life unto death upon the cross – it was sealed when He arose on the third day. On that very day of His resurrection, one of His first priorities was to give those whom He was sending out as His ministers, the authority to forgive sins – the authority to pronounce forgiveness.

On that day of His resurrection, *when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”* John 20:19-23

Christ’s command is to forgive sins! It is His blood which covers all sin and cleanses the baptismal robe, making it white in the blood of the Lamb. This happens when the pastor speaks the very Word Christ commanded him to speak. It is forgiveness won by Christ’s own blood bought authority.

Dear friends in Christ, do you understand the riches of God’s grace showered upon you in the first couple minutes of the Divine Service? You are again renewed in your baptism, God name calling you His own. You are blessed to make the sign of the Holy Cross, a remembrance of the price paid by God’s own Son to purchase you as His very own.

You are invited by God to bring before Him all your sins. He wants them, not so He can punish you for them – for the punishment they deserve has already been meted out upon another, One more holy and righteous than you. He wants you to confess your sins so that He can lift the burden of them from your heavy heart.

It is as Jesus encourages, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt. 11:28-29)

This time in which we gather is not a time for you to come before God and give Him something, as if you could give any worth to Him. What do we have that He needs? This is the time and the place where those who are weary with the trials and tribulations of life come to find rest and peace. This is a time of rest and refreshment in our wilderness journey through this earthly life. Here in this house is where the children come to be comforted and blessed by the gifts of their heavenly Father, purchased by the work of Christ, and sealed in us by the Holy Spirit.

Each Sunday is a glorious day to gather together with our family and hear Christ’s work applied to us. Our gracious and loving God speaks to us a Word of forgiveness! This Word grants salvation and bestows life eternal. Thanks be to God, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.