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

**Divine Service Part III**

**Service of the Sacrament**

Trinity XX – 10.30.2022

Our last two “sermons” on the Divine Service were more like abbreviated Bible Studies than true sermons. To be fair, I have been doing this for a dual purpose, the secondary was to show that Bible Study might be enjoyable (and they might want to join). But primarily that you, God’s children come to a greater appreciation of the incredible gifts God delivers in the Divine Service.

Today we examine the pinnacle, the highlight of our gathering as God’s children, the Service of the Sacrament.

If I were to ask what is the most visible evidence of Christ’s presence in our midst this morning, what would you say that it is? Is it the cross? Maybe the stained glass? A statue of Jesus? No! No! No!

Would it help if I asked, “Is Christ physically present in any way or form this morning?”

His body and His blood will be on our altar – not a symbol of Christ, not a representation of Christ – the very body of Christ which was pierced for you, and the very precious and holy blood of Christ shed for you. You will see, touch, taste, eat, and drink – Christ. This is the greatest, manifest, visitation of God to His people.

On that first Easter, a couple disciples walked with Jesus to Emmaus, but they did not recognize Him as He was talking with them on the road. When they got to their destination and sat down for a meal, they finally recognized Jesu. How? In the breaking of the bread.

Dear friends, the vital importance of this meal is shown to us in the Acts of the Apostles. We are told in a number of passages in Acts that these early Christians celebrated the Breaking of the Bread – the Lord’s Supper – on every first day of ***every*** week.

In our Lutheran Confessions, the book which our congregational constitution declares as the rule and norm for our Christian faith and life, says that in Luther’s day they celebrated the Lord’s Supper on every Lord’s Day, that is, every first day of the week.

Christ’s body, Christ’s blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Can it be meaningless? Could we take it too often? Can ***we*** make it impotent so that it loses all power? Of course not! Whether we believe it to be the True Body and True Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ or not – it is. It is Christ’s Body and Christ’s blood – and it truly gives forgiveness to those who believe.

It can be taken to judgment if it is done by those who receive it carelessly and thoughtlessly. However, this is not a problem with the Lord’s Supper – it is not a problem with what Christ is giving and doing in His Supper. Where it is taken unto judgement, it is a problem with who receive it improperly.

We end our “Service of the Word” standing in reverence to our holy and gracious God, at the end of the “Prayer of the Church.” The “Service of the Sacrament” continues with the Preface.

Again, the pastor blesses the people with God’s Word. At his speaking the reality happens, “the Lord be with you.” Again, God’s people respond and speak God’s blessings upon their shepherd, “and with thy Sprit.” Only as the Spirit is upon us all, do we lift up our hearts and give thanks to God. We give thanks to God by singing the Sanctus – the “holy, holy, holy” – proclaiming by those words what is true about God – that He is holy – and that He comes to us.

Knowing the gracious nature of God, His willingness to come to us and give us His merciful gifts, we pray our table prayer, the very prayer that Jesus gave us to pray.

Yes, the Lord’s Prayer is our communion table prayer! It begins with words which declare our unity to one another as one family sharing – “Our Father.” We have more closely examined this prayer in whole Lenten series. It is also something to examine deeply in Bible Study.

Following this prayer, the pastor repeats the very words of Christ when He first instituted this supper. Christ’s own words bring about the very reality He declares. His body is now present; His blood is now present – they are before us that we might eat and that we might drink. They are before us that we might eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. They are before us that Christ might come to us in ***the most intimate*** way possible.

In reverence to Christ’s presence, that He has now sacramentally united His very flesh to this bread on our altar, the pastor may genuflect after speaking this Word of Christ. Again, in reverence to Christ’s presence, that He has now sacramentally united His very blood to this wine, on our altar the pastor may genuflect after speaking this Word of Christ.

This is also why after the consecration, the pastor holds up the host and the chalice before his face and faces the congregation and proclaims, “the peace of the Lord be with you.” It is not the pastor’s peace you are receiving, it is Christ. It is Christ’s body in the pastor’s hand! It is Christ’s blood in the chalice! It is Christ’s Word issuing from the pastor’s lips.

It is Christ who fills you with His peace! Christ comes with forgiveness! It is Christ who keeps you in all trials and tribulations of this life. It is Christ who fills you with Himself and removes the terror of sin.

Knowing Christ is coming to you, you beg Him for mercy, recognizing Him in this meal. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – the Lamb of God who takes away your sin. God’s Christ who has died for you is now coming to feed you and nourish you.

And yet, you are not alone. You are gathered at the table with those who believe as you do, even as you confessed in the first two words of Christ’s table prayer. There is a unity at this table that is closer than any other. Those who believe differently, those who do not understand, those who deny certain truths of God are not united with us, and so, they do not belong at this table.

Those who do not believe their great need forgiveness, especially those who deny that what God calls sin, is sin – also do not belong at this table. Their impenitence makes a mockery of Christ’s sacrifice, profaning and poisoning this meal.

Knowing what we are receiving, and that we are gathered with our closest family members, our blood-bought family, we eat and drink. This is ***the most*** holy meal. This food was purchased at the greatest expense, not with gold or silver, but with the holy precious blood and the innocent suffering and death of Gods Christ. Amen!

This eating and drinking is the highlight of the entire service. This is food that nourishes body and soul – delivering Christ’s redemption unto life everlasting. This meal preserves and strengthens us in body and soul, keeping us in the true faith until that day. Having communed upon Christ, we can depart in peace – we are prepared to even depart this mortal coil in peace!

That is why we sing the words Simeon sang in the temple after holding the infant Christ; Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

For this most incredible gift, for receiving from God’s own hand the very Body and Blood of His own Son for our forgiveness, we give Him most hearty thanks. This meal strengthens us not only in faith toward God, but it strengthens us in forgiveness – so that we might love and forgive one another even as He has loved us.

But God is not finished with us yet. He desires to give us one last blessing before we leave His house.

Again, incidentally for the third time, pastor and congregation bless one another. “The Lord be with you.” “And with thy spirit.” “Bless we the Lord.” “Thanks be to God!” God is with us, His Spirit fills us, so we bless and thank our holy God for the incredibly merciful gifts that He has showered down upon us.

But there is one last thing to happen in the service. It is not something we do for God, of give to God. ***It is*** from God to us. One last time He comes to us, ***and*** gives us the same blessing that He has given His church for countless generations. We use these words, as God **COMMANDED** this blessing to be spoken.

In Numbers 6, God gave this blessing to Moses. *The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

God’s man speaks as He was commanded to speak by God, and God puts His name upon you. God claims you as His own. You have done – and you do – nothing. It is God who works.

As God’s Word is spoken by God’s chosen instrument, His pastors, He blesses you, He keeps you, He makes His face to shine upon you, He is gracious to you, and He gives you peace.

God’s name begins the service. God’s name ends the service. God continually blesses, bestowing countless gifts throughout the service – it is therefore His service – the Divine Service. It is not our service, it is His. We are the invited guests who are given His name, called by His name, gathered by His name, commune upon His flesh and blood, and are blessed in His name.

Until we join in the eternal heavenly banquet feast, we join Christ in this feast that He sets before us. Rejoice and be glad that God in Christ Jesus Himself comes to us, and cares for us in such an intimate way. Amen.