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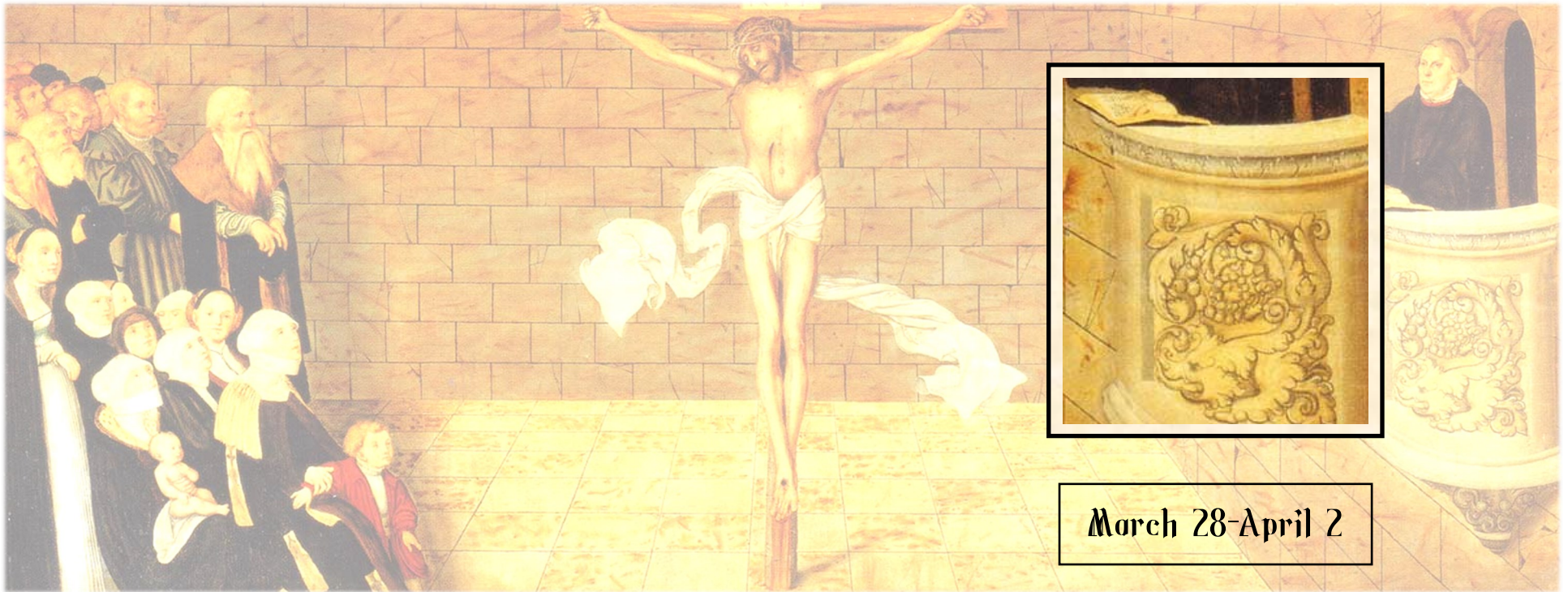
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The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's
1522 Invocavit Sermons



Art

Lucas Cranach painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548. A wild boar is carved into the pulpit, perhaps a reference to Pope Leo X's call for the Lord to judge Martin Luther as a "wild boar" let loose in the vineyard of God's church. Rather, Luther's preaching was rooted in the Word of God.

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 18:2

March 28, 2022

Read

Ephesians 6:10-20

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

But you may say: We live and we ought to live according to the Scriptures, and God has so instituted the sacrament that we must take it with our hands, for he has said, “Take, eat, this is my body” [Matt. 26:26].... I can neither make it compulsory nor defend it. And my reason is that the devil, when he really pushes us to the wall, will argue: Where have you read in the Scriptures that “take” means “grasping with the hands”?... Indeed, how will I answer him when he cites from the Scriptures the very opposite and proves that “take” does not mean to receive with the hands only, but also to convey to ourselves in other ways? “Listen to this, my good fellow,” he will say, “is not the word ‘take’ used by three evangelists when they described the Lord’s taking of gall and vinegar? [Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23; Luke 23:36]. You must admit that the Lord did not touch or handle it with his hands, for his hands were nailed to the cross.”

...Therefore, dear friends, we must be on firm ground if we are to withstand the devil’s attacks [Eph. 6:11]. Although I must acknowledge that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands, nevertheless I must tell you that it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere.... Why will you not in this respect also serve those who are weak in faith and abstain from your liberty?

Luther’s Works, vol. 51, pp. 89-90

Heavenly Father, in You there is no darkness or shifting shadow, but light, truth, and grace. By the same power that enabled You to raise Jesus Christ from the dead and bring light and immortality to light through the gospel, defend us against the assaults of the devil upon our faith and give us a bold confidence in You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

April 2, 2022

1 Cor 11:23-33

By Rev. Dr. Scrivo

When it came to the Sacrament of the Altar, Martin Luther had one primary goal for his hearers: to receive the sacrament to their benefit. To receive the sacrament to one’s benefit simply means to receive it in faith. Believe that what Jesus Christ offers there—His true Body and Blood, along with the bread and wine—is truly for the forgiveness of our sins. It is not some abstract theory for intellectuals in academic halls but a blessing for every Christian to receive.

On the one hand, there is reason to approach the sacrament cautiously. The sacrament comes with a biblical warning: to eat and drink it unworthily is to call judgment upon oneself. For this reason, those who do not believe in Jesus, such as the unbaptized, or those who do not think that they need a savior, such as the unrepentant, or those who deny that Christ is truly present in the sacrament, should refrain from partaking.

But Luther’s primary concern is not to prevent people from communing; it is, rather, to have them commune in faith. He urges them toward a worthy reception, and that worthy reception simply means faith in the Word of Christ. It is faith that Jesus is truly present in that sacrament—bodily, physically, tangibly. It is faith that Jesus offers forgiveness, life, and salvation through this sacrament. It is faith that Jesus and Jesus alone forgives sins, grants eternal life, and saves sinners from the devil on account of His suffering, death, and resurrection in that first Holy Week.

Look to Jesus Christ and to His Word. Trust what He says. Know that He will make good on all His promises to you. Do that, and you are truly “worthy and well prepared” to receive this sacrament.

Lord Jesus, You have promised that You will never forsake us but will be present with us until the end of the age. You make good on that promise whenever two or three gather in Your name to hear Your Word and to receive Your Sacrament. Draw us to Your table in repentance and faith, that we may receive your Sacrament worthily. Amen.

March 30, 2022

Read

1 Cor. 11:17-34

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Today we shall see how we must conduct ourselves here, and also who is worthy to receive the sacrament and who belongs there.

It is very necessary here that your hearts and consciences be well instructed and that you make a big distinction between outward reception and inner and spiritual reception. Bodily and outward reception is that in which a man receives with his mouth the body of Christ and his blood, and doubtless any man can receive the sacrament in this way, without faith and love. But this does not make a man a Christian, for if it did, even a mouse would be a Christian, for it, too, can eat the bread and perchance even drink out of the cup. It is such a simple thing to do. But the true, inner, spiritual reception is a very different thing, for it consists in the right use of the sacrament and its fruits.

I would say in the first place that this reception occurs in faith and is inward and will have Christ.... There must be faith to make the reception worthy and acceptable before God, otherwise it is nothing but sham and a mere external show, which is not Christianity at all. Christianity consists solely in faith, and no outward work must be attached to it.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 92

Lord Jesus, You are the true Word of God, through whom all things were called into being. Though our faith falters in this world of sin, death, and the devil, Your Word strengthens our faith. Though we doubt You time again, Your Word sustains our faith, that we may receive this Sacrament of Your Body and Blood in faith. Amen.

March 31, 2022

Read

2 Thessalonians 3

For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

But faith (which we all must have, if we wish to go to the sacrament worthily) is a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon his shoulders and that he is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father. He who has this faith is the very one who takes his rightful place at this sacrament, and neither devil nor hell nor sin can harm him. Why? Because God is his protector and defender. And when I have this faith, then I am certain God is fighting for me; I can defy the devil, death, hell, and sin, and all the harm with which they threaten me. This is the great, inestimable treasure given us in Christ, which no man can describe or grasp in words. Only faith can take hold of the heart, and not every one has such faith [2 Thess. 3:2]. Therefore this sacrament must not be made a law....

We are not all alike; we do not have equal faith; the faith of one is stronger than that of another. It is therefore impossible that the sacrament can be made a law.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 92-93

O God, You are a mighty fortress and a strong shield around us. By Your gracious deliverance, preserve us from the attacks of the devil. Give us a strong faith in You and Your Word, that we might trust in Your pledge to be with us in the breaking of the bread; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

April 1, 2022

Read

Isaiah 52:7-12

For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

But if you believe that God steps in for you and stakes all he has and his blood for you, as if he were saying: Fall in behind me without fear or delay, and then let us see what can harm you; come devil, death, sin, and hell, and all creation, I shall go before you, for I will be your rear guard and your vanguard [Isa.52:12]; trust me and boldly rely upon me. He who believes that can not be harmed by devil, hell, sin, or death; if God fights for him, what can you do to him?

He who has such faith has his rightful place here and receives the sacrament as an assurance, or seal, or sign to assure him of God's promise and grace. But, of course, we do not all have such faith; would God one-tenth of Christians had it! See, such rich, immeasurable treasures [Eph. 2:7], which God in his grace showers upon us, cannot be the possession of everyone, but only of those who suffer tribulation, physical or spiritual, physically through the persecution of men, spiritually through despair of conscience, outwardly or inwardly, when the devil causes your heart to be weak, timid, and discouraged, so that you do not know how you stand with God, and when he casts your sins into your face. And in such terrified and trembling hearts alone God desires to dwell, as the prophet Isaiah says [Isa. 66:2].

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 93-94

Father of lights, You are the giver of every good and perfect gift from above. Out of the depths of Your eternal mercy, You have poured faith into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Fortify that faith against doubt, enkindle in our hearts devotion toward You, and keep us steadfast in the one, true faith until You take us to be with You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

March 29, 2022

Read

1 Cor. 10:16-33

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Although I hold that it is necessary that the sacrament should be received in both kinds, according to the institution of the Lord, nevertheless it must not be made compulsory nor a general law. ["Both kinds" refers to laity receiving both bread and wine when taking the Sacrament; medieval tradition reserved the wine for clergy.] We must rather promote and practice and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in the matter. Where this is not done, the sacrament becomes for me an outward work and a hypocrisy, which is just what the devil wants. But when the Word is given free course and is not bound to any external observance, it takes hold of one today and sinks into his heart, tomorrow it touches another, and so on. Thus quietly and soberly it does its work, and no one will know how it all came about.

I was glad to know... that some people here had begun to receive the sacrament in both kinds. You should have allowed it to remain thus and not forced it into a law. But now you go at it pell mell, and headlong force every one to it. Dear friends, you will not succeed in that way. For if you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others just because you take the sacrament into your hands and also receive it in both kinds, you are bad Christians as far as I am concerned.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 90-91

Lord Jesus Christ, on the night You instituted this blessed Sacrament, You commanded us to love one another as You have loved us. Prevent us from making the Sacrament a source of division or disunity, and by the Holy Spirit bind us together in Christian love and unity of faith; just as You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.