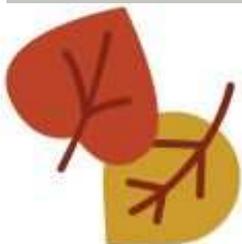


September
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Holy Cross Lutheran Church
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HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Words from the Cross

***For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you. ...
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

1 Cor. 11:23, 26

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

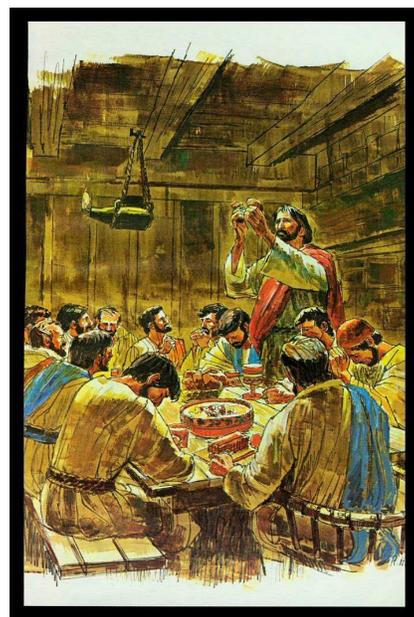
Since I accepted the call to be your pastor over nine years ago, there has been an ongoing discussion about offering Holy Communion every Sunday. For various and sundry reasons this has been "put on hold" several times, but after much study and in consultation with the Board of Elders, we have decided to take the issue off "hold."

To appreciate the Sacrament of the Altar, and desire it regularly, one must first understand what it is, and why Christ wants us to receive it "often." Far too many regular church-goers (including some LCMS members) think that they are doing God a service by coming to church. While they are willing to do this for an hour each week, they are unsure whether they want to commit to the longer communion worship format every week. Perhaps they feel like we are asking them to "up" their commitment to the Lord by asking them to stay in church fifteen minutes longer every other Sunday morning.

But attending church is not a service we perform for God's benefit. It is the other way around. God is doing us a far greater service when we come to church, which is why we call it the "Divine Service." He wants to give to us His gifts, namely His Word and Sacraments. God's reason for wanting us in worship is so that we can freely receive these gifts which are forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

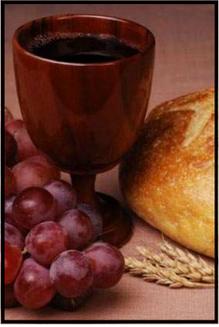
Long ago, Jesus Christ won forgiveness and peace with God for us by His death on the cross. Then Jesus Christ gave us eternal victory over our enemies of sin, death, and the devil by His glorious resurrection. We call this good news — the Gospel. As Christians we gather every week to hear this Gospel preached to us, and also to receive this very same Gospel visibly, tangibly, and personally by receiving Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine. God wants to give us a double portion of His love and grace for us in Christ in worship centered on His preached Word and His distributed Supper of forgiveness.

As Christians we gather weekly in the confidence that Christ is present among us in His Word and Sacrament. For these, along with Holy Baptism, are the means of grace by which Christ has chosen to save us. Just as we come to church in order to hear about what Christ accomplished for us by His obedient suffering and death, so we come to receive in our mouths that same Christ who comes to us in His own true body and blood.



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Like the sermon, the sacrament is the way that Christians receive God's mercy and Christ's forgiveness. Do we have to receive the Sacrament of the Altar weekly? Of course not. But should the church make the Lord's Supper available to those who do desire it that frequently? Yes. When we realize that the Lord's Supper is God's gift to His people in Christ to strengthen their faith and to bring them Jesus — making it available every Sunday seems like a "no brainer".

Luther and the Lutherans after him thought so too. In our Lutheran Confessions, which all Lutheran pastors and congregations are sworn to uphold, we learn that during the Reformation Era and after, it was the practice of every Lutheran congregation to celebrate the Lord's Supper at every Divine Service on every Sunday because of the extremely high importance that Lutherans have placed on the Gospel comfort that Holy Communion provides. The early Lutherans understood that, as sinners, Christians are constantly in need of what the Lord wants to give us in the Lord's Supper.

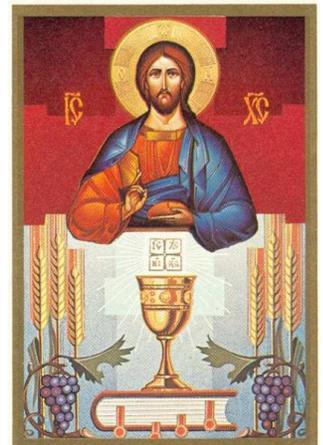
It is unfortunate that in the years following the Reformation, the church practice of offering the Sacrament of the Altar in every service faded away and was forgotten. Pietism and other spiritual movements within Christianity lessened the importance of the Lord's Supper in the life of the Lutheran Church. When these lower views of the Sacrament became dominant, the desire of many Lutherans to receive communion regularly was lessened. Some people even became afraid of the Sacrament which God had intended only to bring abundant comfort and reassurance to believers. At this, the Lutheran Church's lowest theological point, the Sacrament was celebrated only four times a year so that members did not run what they considered the great risk of receiving it unworthily. This happened as strict spiritual preparation for the Lord's Supper (works) became more important than God's grace given in the Lord's Supper. Thankfully, over time, our biblical understanding of the Lord's Supper as Gospel, and the frequency of its use have made a comeback in Lutheran congregations.

Most of the arguments against the practice of every Sunday Communion are really not biblical objections at all, but rather utilitarian concerns such as: "Won't it take too long?" Others will worry that it will take away from the "specialness" of the Lord's Supper. However, we preach the Gospel every Sunday without any similar concern or objection. Others will fear that it will turn into a form of legalism by making members feel that they must come forward to the altar every time the Lord's Supper is offered. However, I want it to be abundantly clear that our congregation is only making the Sacrament available to those who may desire it on a given Sunday, without making any judgments about those who prefer taking it less often.

We will not begin offering Holy Communion every Sunday until we resolve all logistical concerns that need to be worked out with the help of the Altar Guild. Additionally, the Worship Committee is working to make sure that the services do not run too long. In the meantime, we ask for your prayers, input, love, and patience as we work through all the details to get them right.

I am thankful to serve a congregation that recognizes the biblical importance of the Lord's Supper as well as treasures its Gospel reassurance. May God continue to bless us all richly through His means of grace in the Divine Service.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Skelton



For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26