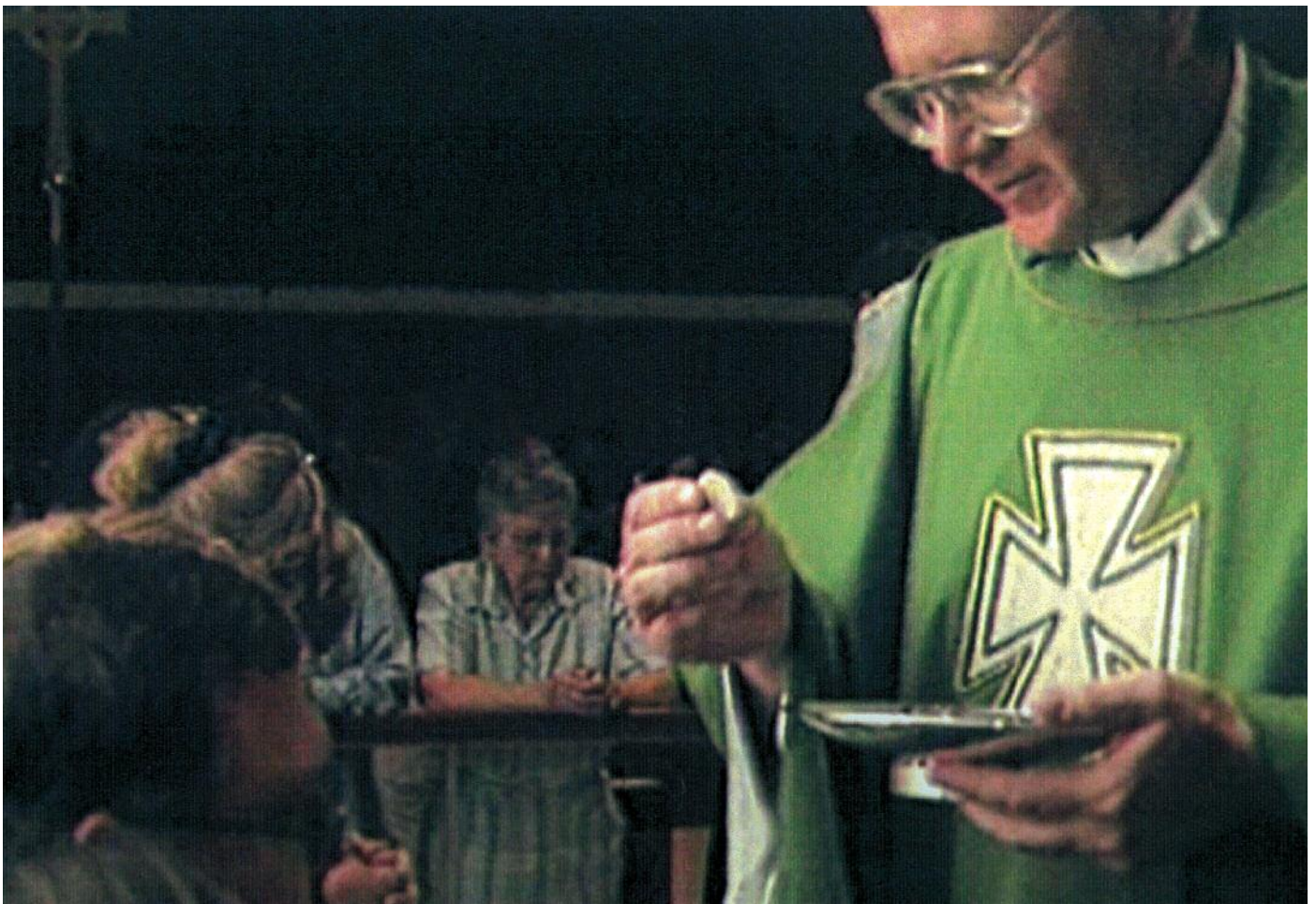


For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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By the Rev. Kenneth W. Wieting, Pastor of Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wis.

The Lord's Supper was central in the worship of Christ's Church right from the beginning. Our Lutheran Confessions trumpet the Scriptural and historical practice in the church when they affirm that the Lord's Supper "is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it." In highlighting this weekly presence our Synod's explanation to Luther's Small Catechism rightly describes the gift of the Lord's Supper as "a regular and major feature of congregational worship, not an occasional extra" (Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Cor. 11:20,33).

7 It Is Not Ours, But the Lord's Supper

By the Rev. Prof. Naomichi Masaki, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Is it the Lord's Supper or our own supper? Is it the Lord's Supper or the Christians' supper? Even if the world of Paul and Luther may seem different from our own, we are still challenged by the same old enemies: the devil, the world, and our flesh. All these enemies continue to attack in order to "diminish my Lord Jesus Christ" (Luther). The confession that it is *the Lord's Supper* has profound implications. Probably the most recognizable thing would be to acknowledge that it is not the pastor's supper nor the congregation's supper as if they may do whatever they please.

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11 Where Is God?

By the Rev. Dr. Daniel L. Gard, Associate Professor of Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Some say that everything changed on September 11 and, in some ways, they are right. Where is God? The answer is right there in our tears. Where is God? He was there as His own Child suffered the agonizing death of the Cross. Where is God? He is there in the rubble and in the pain, never distant from His suffering, sin-wrecked creation but always in the midst of it all. Where is God? He was there at the Pentagon, in New York City, in a field in Pennsylvania.

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The Lord's



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that before there was a New Testament of the Bible, there was the New Testament of Christ's body and blood? Years and decades before there were written copies of the New Testament, the Church was devoted to hearing the preached Word and receiving the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). Down through sixteen and even seventeen centuries, most Christians did not have a copy of the written New Testament in their own language. But through those same sixteen centuries, there is no record of the Church of Christ gathering for worship on the Lord's Day and not being able to receive the New Testament of Christ's body and blood. To be sure, there were abuses in teaching and practice during those centuries. But there was also the underlying reality that the weekly service was a single serving of two courses, Word and Sacrament.

Recounting this truth is not meant to minimize the gift that we have in the written New Testament. God grant us hearts that give thanks for and daily use both the New Testament and Old Testament of our Bibles.

Recounting this truth is, however, meant to remember and rejoice in the central place of the Lord's Supper in the worship of Christ's Church right from the beginning. Our Lutheran Confessions trumpet the Scriptural and historical practice in the church when they affirm that the Lord's Supper "is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the Sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it." In highlighting this weekly presence our Synod's explanation to Luther's Small Catechism rightly describes the gift of the Lord's Supper as "a regular and major feature of congregational worship, not an occasional extra" (Acts 2:42: 20:7: I Cor. 11:20,33).

AND DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that central to understanding the place of the Lord's Supper in the weekly Divine Service is a foundational understanding of the presence of the crucified and risen Christ in the flesh to serve His Church? As Jesus first gave this Holy Meal in the upper room, He taught and then fed His disciples. The subject of His teaching was Himself. The food that He served them was Himself, that is, His very body and blood with the bread and wine. It was one serving with two courses, Word and Sacrament.

Fresh from the grave, Jesus' manner of serving did not change. As He came to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), He first taught them and then He fed them. The subject of His teaching on Easter Eve again was Himself. He thereby set the table for revealing Himself in the breaking of the bread. It was Jesus' doing that their hearts

Supper in the Congregation



were burning as they heard the Old Testament Scriptures testify of Him. It was also Jesus' doing that their eyes were not opened to recognize Him in the flesh until the breaking of the bread. It was a single serving of two courses, Word and Meal. His disappearance after being recognized makes known the nature of His ongoing sacramental presence in the breaking of the bread. The crucified and risen Christ is still there in the flesh, yet unseen.

That's how He comes into our midst today, in the flesh, yet unseen. Where two or three are gathered in His Name, He is in the midst (Mt. 18:20). He is present not to be served but to serve (Mt. 20:28). He still comes with a single serving in two courses, Word and Sacrament. This is not to deny the beauty and blessing and the long history of services for daily prayer in the morning and the evening. God grant that individual and corporate daily prayer increase among us. This statement is rather to affirm that the regular weekly worship of God's people was a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is clearly attested in Scripture, in Church history, and in the Lutheran Confessions.

DID YOU ALSO KNOW?

Did you also know that the chief barrier to recovering the opportunity to commune in each weekly Divine Service in our congregations is the thought that weekly communion would make it too common? A survey taken of all the pastors in the LCMS in the spring of 1999 revealed that the chief concern of those they served was that increased frequency would mean decreased appreciation for Holy Communion.

In one sense, this perspective is understandable, for it holds true for many things in life. Whether it is turkey in the days following Thanksgiving or our favorite dessert served daily for a month, too much of a good thing quickly becomes tiresome. But the Lord's Supper is no ordinary "good thing." It is the body and blood of Him who alone is good, God (Luke 18:19). It is Heavenly Food every bit as holy and healing as God's Holy Word. Therefore the frequency of its use should not be compared to desserts or any other things of this life. It should be compared only to God's Holy Word.

Imagine someone telling us not to read the Bible daily because it would become less special. Do we not know just the opposite to be true? Or imagine the thought that we should not always have the sermon when we gather for weekly worship because it will become too common and people will fail to hear as they should. Indeed, Satan does tempt us to be inattentive to the preached Word. But this does not change the sermon's proper place when we gather together in Jesus' Name and in Jesus' presence. The potential misuse of God's forgiving and life-giving Word should not lessen the opportunity to hear it. Nor should Satan's tempted misuse of Christ's forgiving and life-giving Meal lessen the opportunity to receive it.

By the Rev. Kenneth W. Wieting



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DID YOU ALSO KNOW?

Did you know that the benefits of the Lord's Supper go far beyond the individualistic perspective of our age? To be sure, the Lord's Table is a personal gift, "for you." It is not to be approached lightly without discernment of one's sin and of Christ's real presence to forgive our sin. This is its heart and center. But thoughts only about ourselves and our need demonstrate a fundamental omission in understanding the depth and breadth of this Holy Communion.

Where the Bridegroom Christ is present, so is His holy Bride. Where Christ the Head is present, so is His body the Church. The liturgy leads us to speak correctly in saying "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious Name." In other words, those who have died in Christ are with Him who now comes into our presence to teach and feed us. Here heaven touches earth, for the Ascended Lord of heaven comes to serve us on earth. It is a single serving of two courses, Word and Sacrament. It is a joyous Holy Communion that includes our departed loved ones who have died in the faith.



By God's doing, not ours, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is also a mission proclamation of unparalleled clarity. St. Paul writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (I Cor. 11:26). In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, there is a unified statement by those communing together that reaches back to the cross of Christ and forward to the Second Coming of Christ.

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This joint proclamation assumes a common confession of Jesus' person and His work and His words. The first course of the two-course serving Jesus comes to give us is His Holy Word, the Apostles' doctrine. To have communion at the altar without union in the Apostles' doctrine is contrary to the Holy Spirit's leading of the church (Acts 2:42). The fellowship He gives the church is devoted to both Word and Sacrament. Our Synod's practice of close(d) communion flows from this loving and Spirit-given concern.

FINALLY, DOES JESUS KNOW?

As we touch on just a bit of the history and richness of this heavenly food, we are again directed to the richness of Jesus' love for us sinners. On the night of His betrayal, His every thought was on us and on our need. In the humble means of bread and wine He gave a miracle in His body and blood. Then He went to the cross to sacrifice His body and shed His blood that His forgiveness may ever be given as He promised.

That promised miracle continues today as Jesus comes into our midst to serve it to us. He is present in the flesh to speak His Word to us. He is also present in the flesh to nourish us with heavenly food. It is a single serving of two courses, Word and Sacrament.

Does He who comes among us know our weariness and our burdens? Yes, He does and invites, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). Does He know our fears and worries? Yes, He does and promises "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Does He know our emptiness and our hunger? Yes He does and declares, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Mt. 5:6). Christ knows well our need and comes to meet it. God grant us faith to receive what He is present to give.

I come, O Savior, to your table,
For weak and weary is my soul;
You, Bread of Life, alone are able
To satisfy and make me whole.
Lord, may your body and your blood
Be for my soul the highest good! (LW, #242, v.1)

The Rev. Kenneth W. Wieting is Pastor of Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wis.