

Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Aberfoyle Park

Home Worship Service

Led by Pastor Mike Pietsch

August 8, 2021

Welcome & Introduction

Good morning, and welcome to Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Aberfoyle Park. Welcome to those of you tuning in through our love-stream today. We're a family of Jesus' followers in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, SA. I'm Pastor Mike Pietsch, assisting here today while Pastor Andy and Glenda are on extended leave.

Imagine if your mum or dad said to you as a child: I gave you a hug a week ago and I said that "I love you". But then the child says to their mum or dad: "Can I have another hug today?" But their mum or dad says: "No, I gave you a hug and you know that I still love you."

Imagine a husband saying to his wife when they have been married for several weeks: "I love you". Then the wife asks the husband why he has not kissed her since the day that they were married. He then says to her: "I told you on the day that I married you that I love you and I kissed you then. That will always be true. I do not need to keep giving you a kiss to show you that is true." How do you think the man's wife might feel?

Why do we need to be continually hugged and loved and told that we are loved? We are physical human beings and need the sensation of being often affirmed and loved. We have been especially learning that more and more during this time of covid when we have needed to be more restrictive and keep our 1.5 metre distance between each other. God wants to remind us often that we are loved. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ into the world to love us all and give us the biggest hug to affirm his love for us. He came physically and personally. He gives his love to us in Holy Communion in which he comes to us fully and holistically and says: I love you totally: I love you spiritually, physically, emotionally, personally and mentally. Jesus said something similar when he said we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and

our neighbour as ourselves. God loves us fully and completely with his heart, mind, soul and strength. He wants to feed us and affirm us and live in us and grow in us. He does this by meeting us fully in his gift of coming to us in the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus himself. Even when we are feeling down and out, he still embraces us and comes to us to assure us that he is there for us, in every way. We worship in the name of this God, the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Song

[Nobody Loves Me Like You](#) CCLI#7117604

Verse 1

Morning I see You in the sunrise every morning
It's like a picture that You've painted for me
A love letter in the sky

Verse 2

Story I could've had a really different story
But You came down from Heaven to restore me
Forever saved my life

Chorus 1

Nobody loves me like You love me Jesus
I stand in awe of Your amazing ways
I worship You as long as I am breathing
God You are faithful and true
Nobody loves me like You

Verse 3

Mountains You're breaking down
The weight of all my mountains
Even when it feels like I'm surrounded
You never leave my side oh

Bridge

Oh what a song to sing
Oh what a song to sing
Oh what a song to sing
Oh what a song my heart keeps singing
Oh what a song to sing
Oh what a song to sing

Oh what a song to sing
Jesus You love me
And I love You God

Chorus 2

Nobody loves me like You love me Jesus
I stand in awe of Your amazing ways
I worship You as long as I am breathing
God I worship You
Forever worship You

Ending

Nobody loves me like You love me Jesus
I stand in awe of Your amazing ways
Nobody loves me like You
Nobody loves me like You

Bible Reading

John 6:51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Message

What does Holy Communion mean for you? How has your understanding and appreciation of it changed over the years?

I would like to share with you my personal journey that happened for me around my understanding of Holy Communion. It begins back in 1969 when I was confirmed at the age of 15. I had just completed a two-year confirmation course which I had done under the instruction of my father who was also my pastor. Despite all of his very good teaching, on the day of my confirmation, when I was receiving the Lord's Supper for the first time, I distinctly remember praying at the altar: "Lord, I do not understand how this bread and wine can be your body and blood, but somehow show me." That was a prayer that I prayed about communion a number of times over the next 10 years but received no definite answer. I attended university and mixed with both the Lutheran Students group as well as the evangelical Christian group on campus at Melbourne Uni. The evangelical group primarily had a Reformed church approach, especially when it came to what was understood by the Lord's Supper. The Reformed Church and Baptist church only see the bread and wine as symbolic of Jesus' death. This more logical approach to only seeing the bread and wine as symbolic was reinforced by the general rational framework of the university, as well as my studies in philosophy and psychology.

After finishing my Arts degree, I continued my journey to what I understood was a call to be a Lutheran pastor, and so I started my theological training at the Lutheran seminary in Adelaide. Each year at the seminary we had to do a seminar in one of the areas of pastoral training. In my third year, I did the seminar on the New Testament and the topic that my lecturer chose for that particular year was the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. We were each given a paper to present on that topic and it just so happened that the paper I was given was on the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Now God really had me backed into a corner with this question about whether or not the Lord's Supper is just a symbolical eating and drinking or actual. Here I was training to be a Lutheran pastor, but, after 10 years since my confirmation, still quite unsure about what it meant that Jesus was physically present in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The paper I had to present to the group in the seminar became an existential crisis for me. I read and studied and looked at it from every angle. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus says 'This IS my body, this IS my blood' But does that little word 'IS' mean 'represents' or 'symbolises', as is emphasized by the Reformed and Baptist churches? How was I going to respond and work this out, let alone present it to a Lutheran seminary group of pastors in training? Was I in the wrong church?

When I looked for the Lord's Supper in the Gospel of John, there was no mention of it during the week that led up to Jesus' suffering and death. The closest mention of it comes in John chapter 6 after Jesus fed the 5000 and then talked about himself being the 'bread of life'. But that was not exactly Holy Communion. There was no mention of

wine at all and it was not Passover. But then through my preparation I came across some scholars who noted how the wording of Jesus changed in chapter 6 when we came to verses 51-58. Here the language about Jesus being the 'bread' changes significantly. In these verses, Jesus does not just give us bread, but his 'flesh', as he says in verse 51. This is an emphatic change that gets even stronger as we go along. Now it includes not just 'flesh' but that we are to 'eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood'. This is stated repeatedly four times one after the other in verses 53, 54, 55 and 56: 'eat my flesh and drink my blood'. But it gets even more pointed and stronger. The word for 'eat' in the Greek text is not just the usual word for 'eat'. Jesus uses the Greek word which means 'munch', or to 'seriously eat' or 'chew'.

All this occurs against the background in which John completed his Gospel, possibly some 50 or 60 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. By this stage there were many false teachings around about Jesus and the Christian faith, one of which included Gnosticism. Gnosticism was all about knowledge, especially knowledge about how to gain access to God as you supposedly climbed up the spiritual ladder to God in heaven. You were meant to leave the dark and evil ways of 'the world' below and flee the filthy side of humanity at the bottom of the ladder of life. You would then gradually ascend up the spiritual ladder to the pure light and truth of God. Through his Gospel, John reaches out to people caught up in this false understanding of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. He uses some of the language and concepts of Gnosticism to communicate with these people. He tried to point out that they had gained a distorted idea of the Christian faith, especially as it was heavily influenced by Greek thinking which saw everything that is human as dark and far away from God. We have to run away from this evil down in the world as fast as we could, climbing up the spiritual ladder.

But in chapter one of John's Gospel, the opposite is strongly affirmed where the ultimate Word of God, who was Jesus, leaves heaven and descends to the pits of earth and becomes a human being, taking on filthy sinful human flesh: 'The Word became flesh and lived among us.' This word 'flesh' is the same word as in 6:51 which refers to Jesus' flesh. It seems that Jesus, in the bread chapter of John's Gospel, wanted to emphasize that it was not that we had to climb the spiritual ladder to taste and see and eat God, but that Jesus in the bread and wine, comes down to us in our evil world to give us his actual body and blood, his very flesh. In discovering this new and deeper understanding of Jesus and the presence of Jesus in his flesh and blood, I started to discover what it meant to believe and trust in Jesus and his real physical presence for me in the Lord's Supper. This physical presence is just the continuation of God's incarnation. This continues to be reinforced after Jesus' resurrection when he still had a physical body which could eat and be touched by the disciples. Jesus' physical body

then ascended into heaven and continues to be there as a reminder of his love for the physical world and we his physical people. When we go to heaven, we will also have physical bodies, as we confess in the Apostles Creed.

This was all a watershed insight for me. Since then, I have come to appreciate more and more the depth and power of this physical and concrete presence of Jesus for us in the Lord's Supper. No longer was Jesus' presence in Holy Communion dependent upon whether we believed that he was present, nor whatever the pastor believed, nor whatever the members of the congregation said or believed. Jesus was physically there for me, and you, just as he had been physically present when he walked with his disciples on this earth. This means that Jesus will always be there at the communion table for us, no matter how we feel or how spiritual we are, or are not. As surely as we have a physical body, we are encountered by another physical body in the body and blood of our risen Lord. He encounters us at every level of our being: body, mind, soul and emotions. No matter what we have done, wrong or right, he comes to embrace us and hug us and lift us up to assure us that we are his forgiven and loved children. We could not hear the Gospel more clearly.

Several years ago I was speaking to a pastor who said that in the national church life survey, the main reason why people came to church in his congregation was to receive Holy Communion. He is a good preacher, but when he read this he was a bit put out. He thought that his flock might have said that the main reason they came to weekly worship was to hear a good sermon. Having thought about this in the meantime, I realise that the best message any one can hear is that they are personally loved by God and are a part of his forever family. There is no greater way in which that can be heard and experienced than when receiving the physical embrace and presence of Jesus in Holy Communion. When we are listening to a sermon, like you are now, you might say that the pastor is talking about someone else who is in the church, next to you, or in a different seat, perhaps down the front. But when you receive the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus, you will personally hold in your hands and mouth the body and blood of Jesus who loves you so much and has given his all FOR YOU. It is no wonder that many Lutheran Churches in Australia have gone from having Holy Communion from once each month to every Sunday!!! Jesus feeds his body (the church) with his body, and keeps us close to him and each other through his present reality. In response to such a gift, all we can do is thankfully open our hands, mouths and hearts and praise God. We then have the privilege and joy of allowing Jesus to fully live in us and through us. Amen.

Song

Jesus CCLI#7067249

Verse 1

There is a truth older than the ages
There is a promise of things yet to come
There is One born for our salvation
Jesus
There is a light that overwhelms the darkness
There is a kingdom that forever reigns
There is freedom from the chains that bind us
Jesus, Jesus

Chorus 1

Who walks on the waters
Who speaks to the sea
Who stands in the fire beside me
He roars like a lion
He bled as the Lamb
He carries my healing in His hands
Jesus

Verse 2

There is a name I call in times of trouble
There is a song that comforts in the night
There is a voice that calms the storm that rages
He is Jesus Jesus

Bridge

Messiah, My Savior
There is power in Your name
You're my rock and my Redeemer
There is power in Your name
In Your name

Chorus 2

You walk on the waters
You speak to the sea
You stand in the fire beside me
You roar like a lion
You bled as the Lamb

You carry my healing in Your hands

God

Ending

Jesus

There is no one like You

Jesus

There is no one like You

Confession and Absolution

Pastor: God has given us life, but we have not lived. We have been called to freedom, but we have found the burden heavy, the anxiety painful. In fear and pride we have turned from him to live in self-deceits and to serve other lords. May we commonly admit our wilfulness and weakness in denying God in our lives.

Congregation: Dear God, Father of all, you have made us to live in partnership with you and in loving responsibility to our fellow partners. But we have abused these partnerships. We have tried to run our lives and the world without you. We do not love you as we should, and prefer to trust our own ideas. Forgive us for neglecting to listen to the needs of others when they don't fit in with our thoughts and plans.

Dear God, Jesus Christ, you have shown us what the Father is like. You have opened our eyes to see what it means to be genuinely human because you trusted in your Father and turned in unconditional love to every person no matter whom. Our love for you is often half-hearted.

Dear God, Holy Spirit, without you we would live in the past. In you the Father and Son are made a present reality in our everyday lives and today's world. But we have excluded you from our plans and hopes. We have not trusted in your power to create a new world for us and others today. Heal us then please Lord.

Pastor: Jesus says: 'Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more. Stand up, pick up your life and walk.' Let's share this peace with those around us.

Prayers

Prayer points to ponder:

- Thank you Jesus, that you come to us so personally through the bread and wine of Holy Communion

- Thank you for your unconditional forgiveness and love despite our weakness and sinfulness
- Help us to embrace this gift with open hands, mouths and hearts so we can experience the joy of having you fully live in and through us
- Thank you for continued strong leadership in our government and for safety and protection during lockdown. We lift up to you our neighbours in NSW and in countries overseas who are struggling to manage the COVID outbreaks
- Be with those who are struggling with loneliness, depression, financial or health concerns. We pray especially for people in our own community. Remind them of your love and care for them and prompt each of us to reach out to those who need our support and friendship

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour, and give you peace. Amen.

Song

Satisfied CCLI#7117453

Chorus 1

I count my blessings one by one
Your goodness in my life
How could I ask for more
In You I'm satisfied

Verse 1

All the mountains that I ascend
They leave me empty time and time again
I fix my eyes on this reward
The world behind me now and You before

Chorus 2

I count my blessings one by one
Your goodness in my life
How could I ask for more
In You I'm satisfied
If You are all I have
I know that I will find
That You are all I need
In You I'm satisfied

Verse 2

So let my life be freely spent
For what only only You can give
My richest gain I count as loss
When I survey the wonder of the Cross

Bridge

Nothing else nothing else
Nothing else will ever satisfy
No one else no one else
No one else will ever satisfy

Bridge

There's nothing else
There's nothing else that will ever satisfy
There's no one else
No there's no one else