

4th Sunday after Epiphany C
January 30, 2022
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL

Jeremiah 1:4-10
Psalm 71:1-6
I Cor 11:17-33
Luke 4: 21-30

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I speak to you in the name of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Two weeks ago we observed the Baptism of Jesus and we considered our own baptisms, how it is that in this we receive the forgiveness of sin and are brought into the family of God, embraced by the love of God and welcomed into a community. We noted that our baptism is not merely a onetime event in our life; rather it shapes us and forms us throughout our lives. Baptism is one of two sacraments that we as Lutheran Christians celebrate.

Within the Lutheran Church, sacraments are rites that are commanded by Jesus, accompanied by a common element, and are a means by which God pours grace into our lives. So it is in baptism that we hear Jesus' words, "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is always performed with water – the word, "baptize" means "to wash." And through this sacrament we receive grace upon grace from God's own hand.

The other sacrament that we celebrate is Holy Communion which is also called the Lord's Supper or the Sacrament of the Altar or Holy Eucharist. It was commanded by Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed when he said, "Take and eat..." and "drink you all of it." And the common substances of bread and wine was used and again, grace upon grace is poured into our lives as we eat and drink.

Baptized once. Eating and drinking all life long.

One of the things that I so love about Jesus is his ordinariness. The holy and divine came to earth and lived as a human being. Not a rich and prosperous member of the elite class. No. His stepfather was a carpenter and his mother a poor young woman. An ordinary person. Truly human. And this ordinary man hung out with ordinary folk and they did ordinary things, like sharing a meal together.

If we look at the whole of Scripture, we see a lot of eating and drinking and this is no accident. Abraham and Sarah entertained the Holy Trinity at the Oaks of Mamre. The people of God ate a common meal on the night before they left Egypt, a meal that is commemorated even now thousands of years later. Isaiah spoke to the people in exile and prophesied a feast of rich food and fine wine.

Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors in defiance of the powers that be. Jesus and the disciples found respite at the home of Peter's mother-in-law where they gathered around a table. Thousands were fed from the ordinary food of bread and fishes that by Jesus' gracious hand was transformed into a feast that satisfied all. And on the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus gathered with those closest to him and shared a meal, a Holy Meal.

And after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, in the very early days of the church, people gathered in homes together, meeting in fellowship together and sharing a meal together. This Holy Meal is communal. It is one shared together.

In the same way that Holy Baptism is not an eternal life insurance policy, neither is Holy Communion merely a weekly vitamin that we consume wherever we might find it for our own benefit.

You see, in this communal sharing, something miraculous happens. In a way that I do not understand or comprehend but simply believe, bread and wine also become the very body and blood of Jesus. There isn't a scientific explanation. This defies all logic. It simply is received in faith. When we gather together at the table, when we eat and drink of this sacred meal, Jesus is fully present. Bread and wine are not mere symbols of Jesus' love. Bread and wine are not simple reminders of that night when he gathered with his disciples in the upper room. No. In the bread and wine, it is Jesus who comes to us as we gather as a community of the faith.

Jesus, the Holy One of God. Jesus, before whose throne we bow. Jesus, whose name is above all names. Jesus present with us. Jesus offering himself to us in this holy meal. We come to this Table in reverence acknowledging the magnificence of this gift of grace. We come humbly and gratefully. We come. If we feel unworthy, we come. If we have doubts, we come. If we don't feel particularly spiritual, we come. Because here it is that Jesus comes to meet us. We, who are a community of faith. We who share our lives together. We who worship together. We who are marked with the cross of Christ – forever – we eat together.

So, a couple of practical matters. When we come, we approach this gift and sacrament with reverence, mindful of who it is, Jesus, who was and is and is to come, this is the One whom we receive in this gift of grace. When we come, we do not *take* this gift. Rather, we *receive* this gift. We make of our hands a cradle, a manger if you will, into which Jesus is placed. And throughout the Sacrament and even as the Table is prepared and as it is cleared after the end of our service, we treat the elements with respect and reverence.

During the distribution of this gift of grace, we are mindful that we are gathered together around the Holy Table. The internal chatter in our minds -- of things not yet done, of these yet to do, of random thoughts of random times, these all rest and quiet. Instead, the words of the liturgy in which we have engaged can flood into us – words of confession and forgiveness, words of praise, statements of faith and truth, words of prayer, indeed the very Words of Life proclaimed.

Out of the solemnity of this sacrament, out of the joy that we receive in the grace of God, out of the very gift of Jesus' presence with us, we are nourished, we are fed, we are knit together as fellow-feasters. And this is not for our own comfort, our own joy, our own life in grace. This gift is given, an offering to us, given so that. So that! So that we may be nourished to go forth to serve. So that we may be even more mindful of our life together. So that our daily lives are not lived on to our selves but are wrapped up into the work of God in the world.

But, Pastor, you may say – I cannot do this.

Let me tell you this, "I cannot either." And that's why I keep coming back week upon week. Remembering my baptism. Splashing in those waters. That's why I run to the Table, eager for this gift of grace. And that is why we who have gathered around this Table know that we are fed. Fed to walk this walk. Fed to touch others with the love of Jesus. Fed to

Name the name

Tell the story

Sing the songs of Zion

Splash in the bath
Gather at the Table
Give a shout out –
Y'all come

May it be so. Amen.