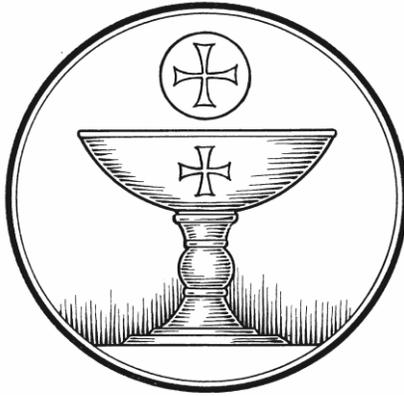


WHY CLOSED COMMUNION?

PART 1



“As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26)

When you participate in the Lord’s Supper, two things happen: you receive from Him the blessings that He has promised to you, and you proclaim your agreement to and unity of doctrine with all others who are at the same altar.

COMMUNION WITH THE LORD

In Holy Communion, you eat Christ’s true body and drink His very blood, as Jesus Himself says clearly, and not in symbols or figures of speech:

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it he broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (St. Matthew 26:26-28; also in St. Mark 14, St. Luke 22, and 1 Corinthians 11)

His Word is spoken over the bread and wine by His called servant of the Word, the pastor, who then distributes Christ’s Body and Blood to you and all other baptized Christians. As the Catechism teaches, that person is truly worthy and well-prepared who has faith in these words: *“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*

If someone does not believe Jesus’ words, or is not properly instructed, then the Lord’s real Body and Blood in the Sacrament does not bring blessings, but judgment. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

“For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

The pastor is also held responsible before God’s judgment if he does not take great care to administer the Lord’s Supper faithfully, and not to anyone’s detriment. (*Ezekiel 33:8-9, Hebrews 13:17*)

COMMUNION WITH ONE ANOTHER

Unlike Baptism, the Lord’s Supper is a Sacrament that occurs not one-by-one, but with the whole congregation at once. It shows complete unity in every way with Christ and with each other. Communing at a particular altar is a public confession, or agreement, to the faith and doctrine that is taught at that particular altar. Paul writes of this in *1 Corinthians 10:16-18*:

“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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?”

When you participate at the altar at Bethlehem, you are publicly proclaiming that you believe and confess everything that is taught here at this altar. This confession is not limited only to some common understanding of “real presence” in the Supper. Participation means you believe and confess as we believe and confess in all articles of the Gospel, not just in a few of them. Thus the Lord’s Supper is a public confession of faith that we all are united in Christ Jesus by the same doctrine. Paul urges this when he tells the Corinthians, *“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)*

When we do not admit members of other denominations to commune at our altar, we are not making a judgment of one’s faith or relationship with Jesus. We are, however, taking them at their word and listening to their public confession of faith. Different denominations are a sad reality of the church today. The reason they exist is because there are different confessions. A person who belongs to a church or church body of a different confession from ours publicly states thereby that he or she agrees with the confession of that church and disagrees with ours. When one is not communed at our Church, we’re not judging that person. We are saying one of the two following things: a) you have not yet been instructed in Lutheran doctrine or b) you belong to an altar of a church that believes, teaches and confesses contrary to the faith that is believed, taught, and confessed at our altar.

For instruction in the Lutheran confession, which is the same as historic Christianity, we invite you to attend our Adult Catechism Class, which is offered at various times throughout the year according to need.

The ACC is normally held periodically during the year. Upon your public profession of the Faith as it is taught in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, you become a communicant member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

WHAT ABOUT ELCA LUTHERANS?

God desires that his people be unified in the same mind and understanding. Sadly, this is not the case with our fellow Christians in the ELCA. There are many major differences in doctrine and church practice between the Missouri Synod and the ELCA. Issues like the authority of Scripture, the role of women in the church and home, homosexuality, and the interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions are but a few differences between the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Due to these major differences, we are not in fellowship with the ELCA. Former members of Bethlehem or another LC-MS congregation, but now members of an ELCA congregation should not expect to commune at Bethlehem, and should speak with the Pastor before approaching the altar.

Other smaller Lutheran church bodies have other, less severe, but still important, differences.

WHAT IF I BELIEVE WHAT IS TAUGHT IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD, BUT BELONG TO ANOTHER DENOMINATION?

If you believe that you are in agreement with us, then we invite you to attend our Adult Catechism Classes to refresh what you already believe, and test it by further study of Scripture. Ask the pastor any questions that may be on your mind, so that you can say a confident “Amen!” to Bethlehem’s teaching and receive our spiritual care as a member of our congregation.

WHY IS THIS ALL SO IMPORTANT?

Christ’s command to His church is to confess the faith that was once delivered to the saints (*Jude 3*). With this in mind, we take our confession of faith very seriously. Paul tells us that we are to watch our doctrine and life closely (*1 Timothy 4:16*).

He also says:

“If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.” (Romans 16:17)

Christ’s Church is a proclaiming church. We pray that you might join our confession of faith as taught in Holy Scripture and explained in the Confessions. We encourage you to attend our Adult Catechism Class and join our fellowship.



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