

March 12

“As Often...Visits to the Doctor or the Gym”

We know that the Corinthian congregation had many problems. In fact, every congregation could say the same thing – hopefully not to the degree of the Corinth Christians. But it is certain that every congregation has its problems and dysfunctions. What's more, each of us individually *knows* that we have a host of problems in our lives.

Consider the people who gravitated toward Jesus: *“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”* (Matthew 9:35, 36).

It is often said that the Church is more like a hospital than a gymnasium. The people drawn toward Jesus were harassed and afflicted. The limited number of people who seemed to be doing well, either physically or materially, may have felt that Jesus did not address their needs, which were likely fewer than those of the harassed. Knowing it or not, however, all of them needed fellowship with God - specifically with this Shepherd Who promised to feed them and heal them with His love, mercy, and presence.

Attending, feeding, and healing were responsibilities of the shepherd. And as we accept that the Lord is our Shepherd, according to Psalm 23, which was written by a shepherd, we note that green pastures are prescribed. He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures.... The harassed congregation at Corinth. Any congregation with dysfunctions. Every sinner with problems. All have the Shepherd's remedy - the green pastures of God's Word and Holy Supper.

When Paul was addressing the problems at Corinth regarding Holy Communion, he said to them, *“As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes”* (1 Corinthians 11:26). This congregation, with problematic sick sinners, needed to come to receive medicine for their soul “often”!

The Jewish people celebrated Passover once a year – but the early church celebrated it almost daily (Acts 2:42). Luther said that if you are not taking communion with frequency, you should check your pulse to see if you're still alive. In this Sacrament, we find both healing and strength! The church is more of a hospital than a gymnasium, yet it is both. If you are sick, you go to the doctor more often than when you are healthy. If you are in good shape, that typically means you have been working out or exercising and eating well. Both examples fit the directive of Paul to take Communion “often.”

This apparent oxymoron works mysteriously: people who know they are sick often take medicine, and yet those who strengthen their faith by God's food of strength and love in the Eucharist are in better

shape spiritually! Sinner/saints worshipping and communing often are the “strong/sick!” Proximity to the healing and strengthening Shepherd is a continual devotion we see in Scripture.

Lord knows we need it!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and Healer, mercifully direct us to Your green pastures. Inspire Your under shepherds to feed us the good fodder of sound and inspirational teaching. May the medication of Your Holy Sacrament bring us the healing of forgiveness of sins – as we trust Your promise and often come to Your table for the healing and strength that we need. Inspire us to “do this” – just as You told us to do. Amen.*