

March 18

I Am “Unworthy!”

This is true...

One of the important qualifications in St. Paul’s directives to the Corinthian congregation was that they should not come to the table if they are “unworthy.”

The full text is here: **“And when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”** (I Corinthians 11:24 – 27)

St. Paul is connecting

- a. the words of institution/consecration spoken by our Lord for Holy Communion;
- b. the proclamation of the death of Christ represented by the words of consecration and the sacrament;
- c. with the actual faithful reception of the communicant.

Those three elements come together in this idea of worthiness or unworthiness.

There are many times that I think about not only the awesome responsibility of faithfully leading the stewardship of worship and Holy Communion... but also my own private reception. Frankly, the norm is I feel “unworthy.” *And I am. I am in the sense that I don’t deserve forgiveness.* I don’t deserve the blessing of being called by God to serve as pastor. Like Luther, who literally shook with fear the first time he celebrated the masses of priests, I feel completely unworthy to be distributing the Lord’s body and blood to others.

In one sense this is all good. **“A broken and contrite heart Lord that would not despise.”** (Psalm 51:17) The Lutheran confessions remind us that a key component to receiving the sacrament worthily is in fact – a broken heart – or the sense that you need, and yet don’t deserve forgiveness. So one component of worthiness is in fact to believe you are “unworthy!”

Since the context (see v. 24-27 above) begins and ends with what Lutherans call “the real presence” (the true presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament), it is also unworthy to receive the sacrament without faith in Christ’s words about His presence. (See also I Corinthians 10:16).

Another mistake people make about worthiness is, concern about how strong their faith needs to be to take communion. The Lutheran Confessions say *“Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit, which the distressed father of little faith (Mark 9:24) enjoyed as well as Abraham, Paul, and others who have a joyful and strong faith.”* (Formula, SD, VII) Remember the *“dimly burning wick”* passage (Is. 42:3)? If this is a problem for you, take extra time to read these verses: Mt. 9:12; 11:28; II Cor. 12:9; Rom. 14:1-3; Jn. 3:15. All of these are specifically referenced in the confessions about this perceived problem.

For people sick with sin or weak in faith, Luther said we must “drive ourselves” to take the sacrament. This is medicine for sick and weak souls - to be healed and strengthened.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ You told us to “come to You” when we are “weary and heavy laden.” By trusting in Your promises may we drive ourselves to the table, to receive You. Protect us from unbelief, inspire us to trust Your Word which has always spoken truth. In Your Name we pray. Amen.*