



Are You Fanatical about the Lord's Supper?

November 23, 2020 / Series / By Kenneth Wieting / 13 Comments / Lords Supper, Series: Our Lord's Supper

The first article in a series on weekly communion.

Weekly communion was not widely practiced for a significant part of the twentieth century in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). In recent decades, however, scores of LCMS congregations have restored weekly communion. Such practices may appear fanatical. Some may pridefully say, “Look how often we do it,” while for others, objections may quickly surface: “Why should we have to do it every week?”

One great error of the Roman Catholic Church perverts the Sacrament into something done by man, an unbloody re-sacrifice by the priest. One great error of Protestants distorts the Sacrament into something done by man, a symbolical act of remembrance and obedience. Lutherans do not commit the errors of Rome or the rationalizing of the Protestants. But questions that take the Sacrament as something we do unwittingly and harmfully distort the action and direction of this holy gift.

The Lutheran Confessions identify the nature of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant errors as fanatical because they speak of the Lord's Supper as something that we do. Dr. Luther narrows in on this in the Large Catechism: "Nearly all the fanatical spirits ... regard the Sacraments, aside from the Word of God, as something that we do" (LC V 7). "Aside from the Word of God" means "apart from." Luther was combatting Zwingli and other Protestants who treated the Sacrament as our human act and denied the gracious promises God connects to it. Luther's reasoning here is closely related to Article V of the Augsburg Confession, which confesses that God is not known apart from His Word.

“

The living Christ, here and now, in the flesh, does this. It is His doing, not ours.

Our sinful default setting focuses first on our own actions; this pertains also to the Lord's Supper. Keeping this in mind, Lutherans do not disconnect Holy Communion from Christ's Holy Word. They do not follow Zwingli's error of denying the forgiveness of sins and the other blessings Christ gives in this Sacrament. Even so, we are constantly tempted to take over the verbs of Scripture and treat God's gifts as our work. We rebels long to be in control. When we view the Sacrament as our doing, we are being fanatical.

Christ-centered questions

The Scriptures confess that the Sacrament is what Christ does for us. Questions about the Sacrament, therefore, are rightly expressed with Him as the subject — the “doer” — of the verbs, not us:

- Why should the living Christ visit sinners like us in such a personal (“for you”) and marvelous way?
- Why should the living Christ have opportunity to do this for His gathered guests each Lord's Day?

This perspective profoundly differs from “our doing” the Sacrament. This perspective is foundational for the recovery of weekly Communion.

Answers to questions about our actions turn us in on ourselves, our habits, our felt needs of the moment. When I was confirmed in the 1960s, my home congregation served the Sacrament four times a year. With that foundation, the faulty question “Why should we do it each month?” could have replaced the faulty question “Why should we do it each week?”

Our Lutheran Confessions’ warning against treating the Lord’s Supper as something we do is a loving warning. Answers to Christ-centered questions explode with beauty and blessing beyond all earthly limits. Scriptural answers show the beating heart of the Divine Service and are full of “life and salvation.” In the Lord’s Supper “we speak of the presence of the living Christ, for we know that ‘death no longer has dominion over Him’ [Rom. 6:9]” (Ap X 57). Thus, what Lutherans confess from Scripture concerning Holy Communion might be summarized this way: The living Christ, here and now, in the flesh, does this. It is His doing, not ours.

Jesus’ great gift

Of all the beautiful acts Jesus did, this is the ultimate gift He gave His church before stepping out into the night on Maundy Thursday. He taught them much in the preceding three years. He did many miracles and signs of feeding, healing and rescue in their presence. Then He set His face toward Jerusalem.

His incarnation, His holy birth, His submission to His parents, His Baptism in the Jordan, His years of visible earthly ministry, all led to the upper room. There at Passover, He prayed high and priestly prayers. He humbly washed dirty feet. Then, He gave His gifts. As He moved steadily to the cross, He bequeathed to His Bride the means by which she would receive forgiveness, His soon-to-be-sacrificed body and blood.

This was His great gift to His gathered disciples and, by extension, to His church before His walk to Gethsemane. Then came the center of human history, the greatest gift of all, His once-for-all sacrifice for the sin of the world. His sacrifice was followed by His open, empty tomb and bodily resurrection to new life for us. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Now, He intercedes for us as both God and man and continues His ministry to us as both God and man, with all authority in heaven and on earth — that is, at God’s right hand.

Each Lord’s Day

“Why should the living Christ give this gift for His gathered guests each Lord’s Day?” To unite bodily with His Bride with all the authority in heaven and earth. The living Christ, here and now, in the flesh, does this. He continues the teaching and doing that He did in His earthly ministry (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:1–11). He does not teach and act today in some spiritualized, “wispy” manner. Rather, “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2), and continues to teach and act in physical, “fleshy” ways. How wondrous! Jesus, the God-man, still ministers in the flesh for us.

The third stanza of Luther's Commandment hymn reinforces this truth about Sabbath Day worship. Concerning the day of rest, he writes, "and put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you" (*LSB* 581:4). Luther's words apply to the preaching Christ does for His gathered church (Rom. 10:17; Luke 10:16). Surely, they also apply to Christ serving His church His holy food. The question "Why should the living Christ come to serve us this wondrous and forgiving gift?" is answered by Luther's Sabbath Day hymn, "so that God may work in you."

"In My remembrance"

What about Jesus' words (Luke 22:19–20) and those of St. Paul (1 Cor. 11:24–25): "Do this in remembrance of me"? This could be translated, "You all keep on doing this in my remembrance." The context of the Last Supper and of God's revelation to St. Paul is important. Those in the upper room were apostles ("sent ones"), as was St. Paul. Jesus sent them to be stewards or house managers of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1–2), and they were to continue setting forth this gift of Christ's ongoing ministry to His people. Luther similarly taught pastors who were hesitant in celebrating Holy Communion. He made clear that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated once or twice on Sundays and during the week, if desired. If pastors had reservations or felt unworthy of this, Luther wrote, "I would tell them that no one compels them except God himself through his call. For since they have the office, they are already obliged and compelled to administer the sacrament when it is requested of them; thus, their excuses are void" (LW 49:207).

When Jesus said "keep on doing this in my remembrance," He wasn't speaking primarily about recalling past history. Rather, He spoke of active remembrance, of receiving in faith the benefits He serves us (AC XXIV 30–32). This is not a conscious activity, a mere mental capacity. Rather, it is recognizing and receiving in faith what Jesus does in His forgiving, life-giving capacity. God is remembering His promise in Christ as Christ serves us. Our remembering is receiving in faith what He is present to give us now from His saving work on Calvary.

“

*God is remembering His promise in Christ as Christ serves
us.*

The Holy Spirit declared Jesus' ongoing sacramental doing on Pentecost. He led the infant church in devotion to the apostles' teaching and to the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). The word translated "devoted to" reveals that the laity were obstinate and immovable in their reception of both Word and Sacrament. They kept on receiving what Jesus came among them to do. The prayers — the ordered worship — and the fellowship of the post-Pentecost church were formed by the ongoing ministry of the risen Christ. He continued to speak His Word and serve His Sacrament to them through His sent ones. The living Christ, there and then, in the flesh, was doing that.

The Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8) remains among us as One who serves at His Table (Luke 22:27; see also Matt. 18:20; 20:28). It is not fanatical to desire His loving and wondrous gift each Lord's Day. "Why should He visit sinners like us in such a personal ('for you') and marvelous way?" Because He loves to give life and light, healing and strength, forgiveness and rest, unity and faith, hope and love, and peace that passes all understanding. Indeed, the holy mystery of His body to eat and His blood to drink passes all understanding. The magnificent truth foundational to this holy mystery is this: The living Christ, here and now, in the flesh, does this.

[Facebook](#)

[Share on X](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Copy Link](#)

[← Previous Post](#)

[Next Post →](#)

About The Author

Kenneth Wieting

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth W. Wieting is a retired pastor and author of *The Blessings of Weekly Communion* and *Lutheranism 101 - The Lord's Supper*, both available from [Concordia Publishing House](#).