

# Pastor Ken's Sermon

---



**SERMON – 10<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST**  
**JOHN 6:22-35 AND EPHESIANS 4:1-16**  
**AUGUST 1, 2021**  
**“WELL PREPARED AND WORTHY?”**

You are immersed in a task and you don't especially want to put it down, the voice is persistent, even forceful...mom...honey...or if it's your boss it's probably just "hey"! As with a call waiting do you *"end and accept...accept and hold...or decline"*? I'm not here referring to multi-tasking – *"walking and chewing gum at the same time"*, scrolling Facebook while taking a call from your sister or joining a Netflix watch party while writing a college paper! What I'm talking about is when someone wants "YOU", i.e. - the physical arms and legs front and center you - like five seconds ago, and in exasperation you blurt out a simple truth - *"I can't be in two places at once"*!

No, you can't. Your physical presence is an either or – all of you is either on the golf course or in the office, with your nursing baby in the rocker or your terrible two-year old in the kitchen! But NOT both! But God can. That's foundational to our understanding of what Holy Communion is. If someone were to ask, "what is a Christian" the simplest and best answer would be *"a Christian is someone who eats and drinks with other Christians, a meal of bread and wine which is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ."* We commune with God

The best source of this is the words Jesus spoke before eating his "last supper" – recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. They say Jesus took an unleavened loaf of bread and cup of wine during a Jewish Passover Seder and said, *"from now on, this cup is my blood and this bread is my flesh."* The gospel of John does not describe this "last supper", but we take the words of our Lord in John 6 to be their equivalent. Eating and drinking this bread and wine are not options for the Christian. Jesus says, *"do this."* Jesus is rarely so blunt. Much of the time our Lord spoke in parables and parables can be a bit opaque. Not so this command to eat and drink. The Lutheran "understanding" of what we are eating and drinking is clear - we are ingesting the same Lord who dwells in heavenly glory – who most assuredly can be in two places at the same time.

The genesis of this series is a question submitted by a member who expressed a desire to discuss what is necessary in NALC churches for someone to commune and clarify what is meant by the Lutheran doctrine of "real presence.". I'll largely take on the former today, and to my colleague Pastor Mark Knappe, I leave the task of addressing the later next week!

Who gets to eat this meal? The answer is the baptized, though now days we impose certain qualifications to that, though I'm not always sure why. From its infancy best as we can tell, the Christian church communed all the baptized. A while back in a series of sermons on baptism, I think (or I hope at least) I laid out a case for the baptizing of infants from very early in the church's history. It is assumed those who were baptized, infant or otherwise, were communed.

Out of concern that infants could not safely swallow a morsel of bread, the church gave the kiddies only a sip of wine. All that changed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century or so when the church decided (wrongly I must add) that the wine was reserved only for the priest – so presto, infants were left with nothing! Practices and policies of “preparation” (instruction) for the sacrament were then developed, after which a child could consume the bread. Ever since then, the question of “who gets to eat and when” became much debated. The NALC has largely continued the practices of the ELCA on this matter – be baptized, instructed, then eat and drink.

The question of preparation, somewhat unfortunately I would say, has become tangled up with question of understanding - precisely that Jesus is “truly present” in this meal, like he said at his last supper and in our lesson today from John. Luther distanced himself from Roman Catholic teaching on the question of “how Jesus is or becomes present.” In the Catholic Mass, it is said a priest through the liturgy “changes” the substance of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus. Luther believed this was an unfortunate attempt to explain a mystery. He said Jesus said, “this is”, so let’s leave it at that and let God worry about how to be in two places at the same time – exalted in heaven and incarnate in our holy meal.

The NALC affirms this understanding of the real presence of Christ even as I admit I cannot explain it. That’s why I leave that part of this series to my friend Pastor Mark! As the baptized person can and ought believe that their sins are forgiven for Jesus sake through a sprinkling of water together with God’s word, so we can and ought believe that Jesus is where he says he is – in this meal of bread and wine. As to preparation, Luther said in the Small Catechism *“that person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”*. That all we need to be “prepared.” Presence, as with forgiveness, we simply have to take God’s word on. Preparation ought to however include self-examination – taking the time to reflect not only on “where God is” but where “you are” in regard to God.

In our lesson from John, Jesus compares the bread he would give (or would become) with the food God gave in the wilderness – manna. Jews ate it and it sustained their physical bodies for a time, but Jesus said the bread he would give (or become) would sustain our spiritual bodies forever. A Christian is someone who by eating and drinking Jesus knows they will eat and drink in his presence eternally – this meal of ours thus being a *“foretaste of the feast to come.”*

Paul in Ephesians runs with this by calling assembled believers the “body of Christ.” We are what we eat. This is what one must believe to be well prepared and worthy. Yes, we must examine ourselves lest our lives belie what we are – we bring shame on ourselves and on the name we bear if we eat this meal cavalierly or absent genuine recognition of our sins, sorrow for them, and an earnest desire to renounce them. Lutheran professor Eric Gritsch said, *““Baptism hooks Christians up...with the resurrected Christ...and the Lord’s Supper provides regular contact when we remember that resurrection.”* To eat this meal in other words is to pay a visit to the cross – and that calls for trusting hearts and attentive ears to lean in but good to hear your Savior say *“Father, forgive them.”* *“The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.* The Christian says *“Lord, give us the bread always.”* AMEN