



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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SERMON – 12<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST  
JOHN 6:51-69 AND I CORINTHIANS 10:16-17  
AUGUST 15, 2021

## “CAN YOU JOIN US FOR THE REHEARSAL DINNER?”

My pastor's journal tells me I've presided at about 80 weddings in my 22 years at this. I've kept no record of how many wedding receptions that includes— let's just say it's a bunch and I usually have the Almond Crusted Chicken! I've also been asked to stop by for a fair number of “rehearsal dinners.” Those are usually more informal affairs – I've attended them at bars, small town cafes, and those little meeting rooms hotels give you for “free” if you first spend a bazillion dollars on a reception with them.

I've also sat down in a few garages for a nice spread, and I can't say I've enjoyed those any less – maybe even more. There's a hominess about garages with white paper streamers dangling down from ceiling trusses, tiny bride and groom glitter sprinkled on pastel plastic table clothes and “cold drinks” served from coolers or them old metal wash basins filled with ice! Kind of my style actually! And since most weddings happen on Saturday afternoons and for 22 years this preacher has had Saturday night services, I suspect I've been to more rehearsal dinners than wedding receptions. It's always been an honor to be invited nonetheless.

The Holy Communion is an invitation to dine with Christ – the church's “bridegroom”. The liturgy of the church is clear – this is a rehearsal dinner we're about to attend! It doesn't take long for us to be singing about a “feast of victory” for our God. Jesus in several parables used a feast or wedding banquet as a metaphor for the kingdom of God and an image of our future. And later when we bring offerings and prepare the table for our Holy Communion, we sing a little song, called a canticle, asking to be “*fed with the bread of life*” – a phrase taken from our Gospel reading today. The one we'll use today is based on I Corinthians 10 and it ends “*let this be a foretaste of all that is to come, when all creation shares this feast with you.*”

There is a Latin saying – “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” (loosely translated as “*the law of praying [is] the law of believing*”) meaning prayer leads to belief, or that it is liturgy which leads to theology – what we believe. What we believe about communion is that we believe what Jesus says about his body and blood - “*My body is real food, and my blood is real drink.*” As Pastor Mark highlighted for us last week, the church hangs a lot on that little word “is.”

Now not all Christian tradition prays the way we do about the Eucharist, so not all of them believe quite the way we do, but Lutherans affirm the presence of Jesus in this meal because we believe Jesus says that “is” where he “is.” Moreover, Jesus says, “*do this in remembrance...*” So, in our liturgy, and in particular the portion we call our Great Thanksgiving and it's Preface, we remember, in different ways at different times of the church year, what it is that we should remember and thank God for. In Advent, we say “*you comforted your people with the promise of the redeemer.*” In Christmas we say, “*in the wonder and mystery of the word made flesh you have opened the eyes of faith to a new and radiant vision of your glory.*”

In Epiphany we say, *“sharing our life Christ lived among us to reveal your glory and love that our darkness should give way to his own brilliant light.”* In Lent we even thank God that he *“bid his people cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the Paschal Feast.”* In Easter...well, do I even need to remind you what we thank God for then? And on the Feast of All Saints, we thank God *“for your saints you have given us that... moved by their witness and supported by their fellowship we may run the race that is set before us.”*

Our liturgy is what we believe, and what we believe is that in this meal we have fellowship with Christ and with all his people. We therefore conclude our meal by praying like this, *“pour out upon us the Spirit of your love O Lord and unite the wills of those whom you have fed with one heavenly food.”* In our lesson from I Corinthians the word “participation” is used, and I want to speak about that. It comes from a Greek word *“koinonia”*, and it means to share in something.

In the Holy Communion we are participants in something – but what? Well of course we are “participating” in Jesus’ sacrifice – we are at the Last Supper and at Calvary. We ingest what our Lord’s disciples were told they were ingesting in the night he was betrayed. We are also participating in the praises of the church since our Lord’s resurrection and if Revelation 7 is to be our guide are ongoing even as we speak. We spoke of the difficulty some traditions have with this – those that speak as though Christ is not present in this meal because Jesus cannot be in two places at once.

Martin Luther had no such inhibitions about this. Lutheran Theologian Robert Jenson wrote *“Luther...was led by his faith in the supper to deny (the assertion) that heaven is any other place than the places of Jesus’ eucharistic body and blood, to deny that there is any spatial separation to overcome between the embodied Jesus in heaven and the loaf and cup on the altar.”* By inference that means the congregation that surrounds the risen Jesus is here with us today too. We “participate” in their worship and they do ours.

When you participate, you are active – you’ve been selected to be involved, engaged, and contribute. The Bible says in the Holy Communion we are involved, engaged, and share in the body and blood of Jesus. We “participate” in it – meaning primarily we eat and drink it. But to eat this meal is to be reminded that God has chosen us to be his provisional presence in the world. We participate in the Holy Communion by being the broken body and outpoured mercy of God to the world and thereby participate in and contribute to what the church was created in Christ Jesus to be – as Ephesians 2:10 says.

Robert Jenson said, *“the bread and wine are, one might say, the appetizer of the great Wedding Supper.”* Golly I love it when I have a thought that someone way smarter than me also had! So I leave you with this. The Holy Communion of the Church is the invitation to dine with Christ – a communion which baptism initiates and Christ’s real presence assures. This meal is the way we are sustained for the “mean time” – and by that I mean these often “mean times” that define our existence – it is “interim food” for travelers who no matter what, know the best is yet to come. We eat this meal in the prayerful hope that on some future All Saints Feast, it will be in memory of us that this congregation gives thanks to God *“for your saints you have given us that...moved by their witness and supported by their fellowship we may run the race that is set before us.”* AMEN