

1 Corinthians 11.23-32

Dies mandati dominici

13 April 2017

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You don't have to be a doctor or nurse to know it: the right medicine applied to the right situation can work miracles. We call that *using* medicine. But the right medicine applied in the wrong situation can kill you. We call that abuse.

We all know this. And we all operate by it. You don't put pills in your cookie jar. Instead, the medicine cabinets we keep in our homes scream out: "Not for casual use." Their height puts them out of the reach of curious little fingers and little mouths, who think a handful of orange Advil tastes as good as a handful of Pez. And to top it off, even our most everyday medicines—Advil, cough syrup, aspirin—have lock tops. Even if you know how to open them, they still make you pause and ask yourself: "This is the right medicine. But is it the right situation?" And we all teach our kids: "Never take a pill unless you know what it is—and then, only if it has been prescribed for you."

Why? Because the right medicine applied in the right situation can work miracles. But even the right medicine taken in the wrong situation can kill you. And the more powerful the medicine, the truer that is. You take chemo for cancer; not a headache.

But of all the medicines out there, one's more powerful than any: the Supper of the Lord Jesus.

For sinners who see their lost condition. And feel the pressing load of sin. And are helpless on their own. And in whom the Lord of heaven and earth has worked faith in the heart in Jesus alone as the Savior from sin and death and the reign of the devil—for them the Supper of the Lord Jesus is a miracle-working medicine. Because it doesn't deal with symptoms, it deals with root causes. It is "for you." That is, it is for *sinners*. And this is the miracle. It brings the *forgiveness* of sin. And where there's forgiveness of sins, there's also—you know the line—life and salvation. This is the medicine that the Lord Jesus has given to you, His dear Christians. Powerful stuff. The right medicine. For you to use.

But this "right medicine" is also powerful enough that it can kill.

And that's the situation Paul found in Corinth. The Supper was being abused. And it wasn't bringing life. It was bringing death.

Now, as I mentioned, the Lord gave this Supper to His dear Christians. That is, He gave it to those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness that Jesus won on His holy cross. And who find that righteousness where the Lord said it is: in His Body and Blood in the Sacrament.

But some of those early Christians had abused this medicine. They had received it to their judgment. To the point that some of them had grown sick and weak and even died.

The Supper of the Lord still has that power today. Nothing has changed. Because with a word—with the Lord's Word, no less—the Sacrament isn't just bread and wine. Jesus tells us so, and every record of the words of institution say it: The bread is His Body. The wine is His Blood.

This is the objective reality that every Christian depends on. I can't find forgiveness of sins in myself. Neither can you. That phrase that "You just have to forgive yourself" is the worst one you could ever use.

Nor can I find holiness in myself. And neither can you. I can't find any way out of my death and condemnation. And neither can you.

But Jesus has promised me this: He comes to me in my helplessness and He gives me something.

- Something that deals with my sins summarily—His very own Body that was broken for my sins, just as the prophets had said. His very own Blood shed as the requirement to atone for guilt.
- Something that replaces my death with His life—His resurrected Body and Blood.
- Something that takes me from the pit of hell and places me in heaven with Him—His ascended Body and Blood that even now plead for me at the right hand of the Father.

That's the objective reality I must depend on. And when I touch that Bread and drink that Cup, I handle mighty things. A medicine that undoes death itself. An elixir that opens heaven to hell-bound me. Things that are holy, because if Christ is holy, then surely His Body and Blood are holy, too. Even more, things that are holy because if Christ is holy, then His promises be holy, too—forgiveness and atonement for sin.

But some of the Corinthians had lost sight of that—that the Sacrament is holy. Which is to say that they had lost sight that it is Christ's Body and Blood. Paul says they weren't "discerning the Body." They scorned the very words of Jesus, "This is My Body. This is My Blood." Which meant that they certainly weren't receiving it for the reason Christ gave it, the forgiveness of sins.

Because they had other reasons. It was an occasion for a get-together. And as in so many human get-togethers, that became an occasion for social sorting. The haves and the have-nots. The cool people and the nerds. You could put it like this: The Sacrament of the Altar had become for them a pretext for something else. A pretext for something else because they failed to trust and believe and discern what it is: The Body and Blood of Christ. Given and shed for no other purpose than to forgive sinners and to free from death and everlasting hell. And in *that* they became substance-abusers.

Now, I want to pause and explain something that's really important. It's more than one Lutheran who thinks that it's your faith that makes the Body and Blood of Jesus the Body and Blood of Jesus. If I believe it is, then it is. If don't, then it's not. And no harm done.

But just like the bottle that says "Advil" on it contains Advil, whether you believe it or not, so the Bread and Wine, which are the Body and Blood of Christ, are the Body and Blood of Christ no matter what you *believe*. It does you no good to pretend Advil is M&Ms or Pez as you throw back a handful of them. And to think it's for getting fat off sugar and not for alleviating headaches.

In the same exact way, it does no good—and, in fact, only bad—to take the Body and Blood of Jesus pretending it's nothing more than a snack of wine and crackers, only not in your living room but at 9th

and Fillmore. And to think the whole point is just so you can get together in a cool building with people you happen to like and not for the forgiveness of sins. And then, while all that's going on, to look down your nose at someone else who's...too fat...or too loud...or doesn't dress nicely enough...or whose tastes differ...or who isn't in your club...or who makes choices you wouldn't...or who's too poor...or too rich. Hardly the love after His own example that Jesus laid upon His holy Church on the night when He was betrayed.

But isn't that the original sinful impulse? To tell God that what He says something is and does isn't what it is and doesn't do what it does? Or to act like it?

If that's you, check your attitude at the door. And repent.

And know this: what you think or don't think doesn't change what the Sacrament is. Because the Word of the Lord endures forever: "This is My Body. This is My Blood. For the forgiveness of all your sins."

But thanks be to God for that! Thanks be to God that His Word stands firm and secure. That mere mistaken belief or wishful thinking or how rotten you are or feel or how much you've abused this medicine—thanks be to God that none of that can change the promises of God to you *right now!* Thanks be to God that none of it can change what He gives and offers you: the true Body and Blood of His Son Jesus Christ.

Because that Body and Blood—they are true medicine. True medicine for *sinners*. For sinners like the whole crew of the disciples who on Maundy Thursday got into an embarrassing tiff over who was the greatest in the kingdom. Over who'd get to sit next to the Messiah in His kingdom. For sinners like impetuous Peter who...just wouldn't let towel-wrapped, foot-washing Jesus be what He is and do what He does. Who later that tonight denied even knowing Jesus. For sinners like Thomas who refused to...take God at His Word that the Messiah should rise and so wouldn't believe that his fellow disciples had seen the risen, living Christ. In other words, for sinners just like you.

For sinners like you who need help from the outside, because no matter where you turn on the inside all you see is sin, death, and hell. For sinners like you, whom Jesus loved to the end. And for whom He died that you might live. Who offered His Body to be broken for you—and now places it in your mouth. Who shed His holy Blood to cleanse you from all your iniquity—and now gives it to you as true medicine.

That's who this medicine is for. That's how it's supposed to be used. It's to be taken, eaten, and drunk by sinners. By sinners—just like you—who see their lost condition...and their only hope in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May the good and gracious Lord grant you all such a worthy eating and drinking of His holy Body and Blood. Amen.

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