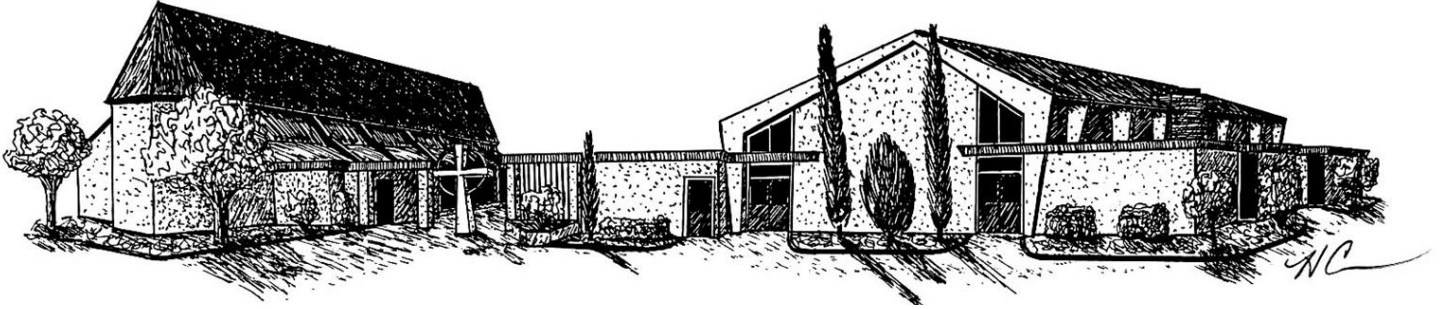


Lutheran Church of Our Savior



March 4, AD 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Our Lord Jesus,

Grace and peace be multiplied to you.

An Encouragement to Make Use Again of the Lord's Supper

Lententide greetings to you in our Lord Jesus. As, with a sunrise, one day turns to a new day, I'm reminded of the following words, inspired by God the Holy Spirit: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23; ESV, and hereafter). In midst of our life's own struggles, trials, even lamentations, it remains ever so: The steadfast love of our Lord never ceases; His mercies never will end.

I'm writing to encourage you to make use once again of the Lord's Supper, if through the past months you haven't been making use of it. Here's why.

The Vital Nature of the Means of Grace. *Our Augsburg Confession states: "That we may obtain this faith [in Christ and His saving work], the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel" (AC V, Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1921). Here we confess that God gives the Holy Spirit through the Word and the sacraments. In His wisdom these are the means He's chosen through which to work faith until the end of time.*

*I pray and trust that even if you've not received the Lord's Supper in recent months, still you've made regular use of the Lord's Word (through individual reading, listening to recordings of LCOS services and sermons, or in other ways). If not, I urge you to begin without any further delay. We praise and thank our God for His superabundant provision of grace through various means; yet we also recognize and confess that the Lord's Supper helps and aids in needful ways. Three words recall for us how valuable this sacrament is for us at all times: flesh, world, devil (cf. 'Christian Questions with Their Answers, 20.). The Holy Scriptures teach us that in us dwells the old sinful **flesh** (or nature), which wars and rages against the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. That sinful nature takes aim at faithfulness, love, longsuffering, joy, and peace, etc. (Gal 5:17, 22). If the constant tension between the old sinful nature and the Spirit isn't reason enough, you and I still find ourselves in the unbelieving **world**, though not of it.*

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Daily (even without stepping outside the front door) we encounter pressures, suggestions, and temptations that would seduce and mislead us into false belief, despair, or some other shame or vice (cf. *Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer Sixth Petition*). And if these weren't themselves reason enough to seek the Supper, the **devil** is still the devil—insidious, murderous, slanderous, ruthless; and he's got his eye on you. He prowls around like a roaring lion, searching for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), to accuse. Given what we're up against, can we afford to go for long without God's help and aid—His Spirit—given to us also through the Lord's Supper?

The Risks. While time has been valuable in better gauging the dangers and risks of this coronavirus (COVID-19), dangers and risks remain—and for some more than for others. The oft-repeated statistic reminds us that in general those who'd contract the virus have a 99% recovery rate if up to near seventy years old, and a 94% or greater rate in those above seventy; yet the effects of the virus can be severe for those in older age and with underlying conditions (comorbidities). There are risks in going to Holy Communion; let that be said. There are, however, risks in almost anything we might do, or in anywhere we might go. Those who travelled the hills and sometimes dangerous highways of Galilee in order to hear Jesus preach assumed risk. Those who brought their dear ailing ones (with sicknesses of all kinds) to Jesus that He might heal them assumed risk of exposure to other sicknesses. The annual pilgrims who journeyed to Jerusalem for the great feasts (like Passover) also assumed it. Just like the early Christians who gathered to worship despite civil imperial threats against them, present-day persecuted Christians who gather secretly in various parts of the world take sure risks each time they meet. We know that risk is everywhere in this life, and we know that death is always close at hand.

In which is the greater risk: Receiving Holy Communion, or going without it?

How Can I Make Use of the Lord's Supper? I well imagine that for many it's not a lack of hunger for the Supper that's kept you from it, but concern for your health or the dear concern for the well-being of those in your household (who may be more at risk) that's cause for hesitation. Please be assured that we of Lutheran Church of Our Savior are conscientious of the virus and attentive to the concerns over it. Therefore, we've implemented mitigation efforts that aim to slow or stop the spread of the virus, if God wills it (such efforts include the wearing of masks; social-distancing of worshippers; sanitization of chairs; etc.). We're grateful to report that during our many months of services outdoors and indoors (venues in compliance with state and local restrictions), we're not aware of a single case of COVID-19 that has been contracted by attending our worship services. (I'm not sure that we could say that even of annual seasonal flus.)

If individual (or family) circumstances would suggest it, one of the pastors could arrange to bring to you Holy Communion. This we've done throughout the greater course of the pandemic, meeting, for example, in the open air of a backyard patio, masked and suitably distanced. (The church grounds have been used in the same way.)

Risk Versus Reward. As I write, several trial vaccines already are being administered to many millions of Americans. These may, in months to come, return daily life to a state of normality. Case rates and hospitalizations are dropping; therapeutics are improving the prognoses of those who'd contract the virus; our nation is steadily approaching 'herd immunity.' Even if more progress in combatting COVID-19 is made, the ever-present risks of living life will remain. When is it 'safe enough' to make use again of the Lord's Supper? St. Ignatius of Antioch (AD 35 – AD 103) once called the sacrament 'The medicine of immortality.' The apostle Paul taught us that our partaking of it is a proclamation of the Lord's death, an act of confession (1 Cor 11:26).

Conclusion. In his *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther explains that our Lord Jesus both has **directed** us to receive His Supper ("Do this in remembrance of me," Lk 22:19) and has **promised** to encourage and strengthen the faithful by it "(This is my body, which is given for you," Lk 22:19; "This is my blood...for the forgiveness of sins," Mt 26:28). I warmly and heartily encourage you to consider how you can make use once again of God's help and aid for you found in the Lord's Supper.

In Christ,
Pastor John Bestul