

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS IN HIS SERVICE

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

TEACHING SERVICE Point I:

The Preparation.

Today's sermon has been divided into four parts to remind us of God's work in serving us His gifts in His Divine Service. We pray that these "sermonettes" will help us to better treasure, understand and communicate God's faithful Service to us and that our response is then given back to Him in the Faith. It is our hope that you will gain a greater understanding and feeling for the proclamation of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins which He works through His "liturgy," which means, "public services," in the Church.

Though many of the Lord's Services through which we receive God's gifts here are contained in the *Lutheran Service Book*, their orders and rites are much older than the confession of the Faith now called "Lutheran." The Lord's Services may be rightly thought of proclaiming that God first speaks to us through His Word and we then respond back to Him and one another through His Word. It is the Word of God which remains central to the Lord's Services as we receive His gifts through time-honored liturgies – public-services – of the Church.

This manner of public address unites us with "liturgical congregations" throughout the world and over the ages. We are part of the confessing Church, the One which continues to say in steadfastness to the Faith: "This we believe." We are called "confessional Lutherans." This means that we publicly confess, especially through the Lord's Day Services, that we are Christians as we hear and respond to His Word in the Faith.

Therefore, a concern for the confessing believer is that all the Church's public services be catholic, or "universal." Any person who attends here, whether he or she is "Lutheran," "Anglican," "Roman Catholic," et cetera, should be able to hear consistency and stability in the Lord's Divine Services. He or she should think and feel that we are one with that which God is doing around the world. They should hear and believe that we receive Him through the words and hymns of the Church. To that end, the whole service, from Invocation to Benediction is God's gift through which He delivers Christ-crucified to us for the forgiveness of our sins. Simply put, in a confessional congregation the Lord's Service is given to call us on our sins and sinfulness, and to proclaim to us our Savior.

Today's written order for the Lord's Divine Service dates to about 100 years ago. This Service order was purposefully developed to follow the Reformation tenants of Faith Alone, Grace Alone and Scripture Alone. It was introduced in the former English Synod – from which the English District of the LCMS, of which this congregation is a member, was formed. It was first put into wide public use in the English-speaking congregations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in 1931.

Today, we receive God's gifts through that which our hymnals name, "Divine Service III." (It is otherwise known as "The Common Service.") Though given in the form we have now just a century ago, we are free to discover that through it God has joined us to His Church in time and in history. Through His public services (Divine liturgies), God has kept us fully grounded through His rightly ordered Word.

Our physical actions may also help communicate God's truths in His Services. Whenever anyone faces the congregation during the Lord's Service, we say he is standing in the "sacramental position." That is to say,

he is declaring God's Word, in Christ's stead, through or under the Office that Christ established. From a Pastor standing in this position, Christ calls you to repent and declares the Father's forgiveness to you.

On the other hand, whenever the servants of Christ face the same direction as the congregation, here that is the liturgical and actual East, we say that he is standing in the "sacrificial position." In such times, he stands with you before the Lord. Facing East, he confesses with you: as we offer to God our sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

The Divine Service may be divided into four chief parts: The Preparation; The Service of the Word; The Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament; and the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar. The first part, the Preparation, in differing forms, additionally stands alone in the Rites of Holy Baptism; Private Confession/Absolution; and Corporate Confession/Absolution. The Service of the Word stands alone in the services of Matins, Morning Prayer, Vespers, Evening Prayer and Vespers. The Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament is recorded in our hymnals as part of Dr. Luther's Small Catechism.

The fourth part is a Service which does not stand alone. Christ and His Apostles left us examples in Holy Scripture that teach that the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar is not separate from the Service of the Word of God. Therefore, the Service of the Sacrament is always accompanied by preaching. Such preaching includes all proclamation of the Word done from the sacramental position, facing the congregation.

The four parts of the Lord's Service as we receive them today are in the order in which we have received them not simply because of tradition. Rather they fall into this order because they best communicate, cross-culturally, cross-time, that which God is doing in His Service to His people.

They are ordered to rightly declare God's gifts as He comes to us with Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of our sins.

For example, Confession and Absolution comes first. That is fitting because it is the Service of Entrance into the Church for those of the Faith as well as those who would be of the Faith. For unbaptized people present, it brings that which it declares to those who recognize their sins, sorrow over them and will to turn from them. For the Baptized among us, Confession and Absolution return us to God's washing of regeneration and renewal. It brings us, from God, through His ambassador standing in the sacramental position, forgiveness of sins.

Now, we turn to where your bulletin usually starts. Before the Invocation of God's Name, the actual beginning of the Lord's Service, our congregation hears and participates in music. Pre-service music, which may be followed by Processional, Entrance or Invocation Hymns, is a wonderful vehicle to help prepare us for that which God wills to do through His Word for the day. Musicians carefully select their pieces in order to reinforce the themes that will be proclaimed through the day's readings. (What is the primary biblical and confessional purpose that all music in the Lord's Services serves? It is to support the readings of the day as it proclaims our sin and God's grace for us).

That is why our congregation asks that we keep conversation subdued or silent, once we come inside those doors in the 10 minutes or so before the pre-service music. That frees you to hear and reflect on the compositions played into your ears; to read through the texts and prayers for the day; and to pray prayers such as those listed in the front of our hymnals. All of that may happen before the Lord's Service begins!

Most Divine Services typically begin with The Preparation. The opening word of the Lord's Service, the Invocation, is the Name of God. His Name is placed upon the baptized as they are washed with the water and the Word. To remind you of that, the servants of the Lord in this place begin His Services over the font.

As we speak God's Name, we stand as we are able. This gives us another reminder that the Presence of the Lord with His People. We rise in honor of the King of Kings. (That is also why confessing congregations usually stand during the singing, chanting or speaking of the Name of the Lord). As we hear God's Name, responding with "Amen," the Church both calls upon God and recognizes that He is with us.¹

In Evangelical congregations such as this one, Christians are encouraged to make the sign of the cross when they hear the invocation. It is with that image they, you, were marked in Baptism. With this sign you are free to remind yourself of the miraculous event in which God named you with His own family Name. It is also why we simply speak the Name of the Lord, and don't add phrases such as "we begin...." We believe, teach and confess that we begin nothing. God who has begun His good work in us will complete it to the end.

Following the Invocation, the Preparation contains the Order of Public Confession and the reason why Christians confess their sins: the Holy Absolution. With words of confession, we declare that the Law of God is doing its work in us: showing us our sins, causing us to sorrow over them and creating a desire in us to turn from them. The Absolution, then, is God declaring His Son's blood-bought forgiveness to us. The Father speaks through the means of a called and ordained man's mouth: the forgiveness

¹ Cf. Matthew 18:20.

Jesus won on the cross is declared to repentant sinners. Holy absolution is pure Gospel – Good News – for sinners.

For the baptized, the Confession and Absolution are tied directly to that Sacrament. For the unbaptized, The Preparation is an open means of grace. God's Word, brings forgiveness even to the repentant, yet unbaptized, person. Jesus pronounced Holy Absolution on unbaptized people: so too does His Church.

Now that we have heard some of the working of God in the Preparation, let us receive His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation through this first of the four parts of the Lord's Service to His people. (Please stand).

TEACHING SERVICE Point II: **The Service of the Word**

(Please be seated). Now God's Service to us moves us from the declaration of the forgiveness of sins in the Preparation to the proclamation of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of the whole world's sins in the Service of the Word. The hymns chants, prayers and words of this section lead the hearers of the Word of God to the first high point of the Divine Liturgy.

To that end, there is order in the Divine Service. That is heard in the manner in which we say, chant or sing the Word of God. As in musicals on stage or screen, some of the dialogue is spoken and some is sung. A basic principle that guides us is this: when the pastor/deacon/or student sings, the congregation sings. When the leader chants, you chant. When the leader speaks, the members of the assembly speak in response.

The Service of the Word typically begins with a Psalm, Introit (to Enter) or a hymn that is tied to the Psalm for the week. The purpose of the Psalm/Introit is to set the Gospel tone for the hearer. Then, when the Gospel text is read, your heart has been prepared to respond to it through the Word of God. The Christian is free to read, chant or sing the day's Psalm and ask, "Where is Christ in this text, and how will He be declared from here on in the other readings? "

The Psalm today is 111, which was appointed for Trinity XXIII a long time ago. In it we hear of the Christ Who was sent by the Father to buy us back from sin, death and hell. We hear that God has given His Word which declare His works. It calls us to Wisdom through the hearing and reception of His gifts.

From there, the Church's song moves to the Kyrie "Lord" Hymn. The Kyrie is the prayer of forgiven sinners for themselves and for the Church universal. Also, you are free to understand that the three-fold prayer which you pray is to Father, Son and Holy Spirit on behalf and in the stead of those who cannot pray rightly for themselves – including all unbelievers. In that manner, the Kyrie is intercessory. In the "Lord, have mercy" prayer, you exercise your work as God's kingdom priests.

From your pleas for mercy, except in the penitential seasons, the Lord's Service moves from the Kyrie to the Gloria. There, our voices join the angels who sang at the announcement of Christ' birth. Next, the Collect prayer is offered. The Collects are traditionally spoken on behalf of the congregation by the presiding pastor standing in the sacrificial position. The Collects were composed, many of them centuries ago, following the guidelines established at the Council of Hippo in AD 300. They are to lead us to the Gospel emphasis for the day. As you hear the Collect, you can learn where the theme of the Day is likely headed.

Following the Collects, three readings are typically read in God's Divine Services. They are read as "sacramental acts." That means that God is working through the Office of the Holy Ministry to bring His grace to His people. When the words of the primary readings are proclaimed, you are to understand that God is speaking through men – following His Order of Creation – men as the scriptures declare: *let a man continue to reckon us as servants of Christ and stewards of (the) mysteries of God...and, give attention to the readings, to the exhortation, to the teaching.*²

The first reading is usually from the Old Testament. In it you will find God preparing the way for the emphasis the Gospel will bring forth

² *1 Corinthians* 4:1 and *1 Timothy* 4:13, NA 27.

for the week. Today, we learn that true Wisdom is a gift of God, fulfilled completely in the inheritance we receive through Christ's death.

The second reading is usually from one of the Epistles – Letters – of the New Testament. This reading looks back to the Gospel of the day. Today the Epistle declares that, by remaining in the Word, following the apostolic example of the Faith, we remain in Christ and are thereby prepared for the resurrection of our bodies to glory.

The third reading, the Gospel, marks the high point of the Service of the Word. It usually contains Jesus' direct words. Today, He declares the wisdom of God in proclaiming that we are free to render to God the things that are His. That is because God gave His best for us in sending the Christ to be our sin-bearer.

Between the readings there are often hymns, verses or psalms. These are to allow for movement in the Chancel and into the Nave and back. For example, today we had a Gradual Psalm. Centuries ago, the men whom God had called to publicly read His Word in His services proclaimed it from a step called a Gradus. Psalms and hymns encourage movement in your hearing as the Word travels from the Promise of the Old Covenant, the Life of the New Testament and the realized Promise of the New Testament – Christ Jesus and Him crucified for your forgiveness.

Following the Gospel Reading, the congregation, in this order of service, typically responds with the Confession of the Church. As a confessing Church, we may recite one of four ecumenical creeds. They are accepted by all who desire to rightly confess God before the world. The Creeds were composed to prevent openly heretical individuals and heterodox confessing peoples from masquerading as true Christians. At their centers, we confess the most about Jesus as the Christ.

The shortest of these is called the Apostle's Creed. That is normally reserved for Baptismal services or those wherein the Lord's Supper is not celebrated. The next longest is the Nicene Creed. It is typically reserved for services containing the Sacrament of the Altar. The third is the sung Creed, called the *Te Deum*. In the Church catholic in the Order of Matins, that sung Creed is heard daily somewhere in the world. The fourth Creed is the longest, the Athanasian Creed. It is the most comprehensive confession of the Faith. It was not likely composed for use in the public services of God. Yet here, we, due to this congregation's understanding of the teaching about our need to publicly confess before the world, the devil and our own sinful flesh, recite it on fifth Sundays of the month when they occur. Having learned or been refreshed a bit about God's gifts through the Service of the Word, we now stand for the Psalm.

TEACHING SERVICE Point III:

The Sermon and the Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament.

(Please be seated). The Sermon follows the Church's confession of the Faith and the Hymn of the Day in this order of service. That hymn is carefully chosen to tie to the theme of the day. Here, due to the diligence of our Church musicians, it is usually connected to the text which will be the basis for the sermon – this year for me, that has been the Gospel reading.

The sermon was placed where it is centuries ago that it might to look back upon Jesus' words in the readings and forward to Jesus' coming in the Sacrament of the Altar. Thus, the Sermon was placed between the two peaks of the Lord's Divine Service. They are the reading of the Gospel and the Administration of the Sacrament of the Altar.

When a pastor preaches God's Word, Christ is speaking through him, from Christ's Office. Because pastors are human, and subject to sin and all its effects, we sometimes miss clearly declaring the point of Holy Scripture: Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins. Therefore, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Visible Means of Grace, was placed after the sermon, following our Lord's practice which occurred first on the night in which He was betrayed.

Following the sermon, the Church who has been again led to the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection for forgiveness and the declaration of being right with the Eternal Father, chants the Offertory. This a prayer of the Church based upon the 51st Psalm. When we sing or say the Word of God to the Father, we always have the right things to say!

From that prayer, in this order of the Lord's Service, we are called to give back to God from that which God has given to us. We often hear of two forms of giving – both which are appropriate to Christian Stewardship.

The first is called a “tithe,” which indicates a tenth part. In biblical terms, a tithe is a gift back to the Lord from any increase with which one has been blessed. The other term is, “first-fruit offering.” These are our gifts to the Lord which display our use of the Faith and trust in Him to provide more for us. Biblically, they were given of the first harvest of the fruits of the earth. Believers, in such giving, display our trust that the Lord will continue to provide for all of our needs for this body and life. A third offering might be that which is given in thanks. In all this, the Christian is called to give forth as Scripture declares, “*Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*”³

Next, following that thought, remembering that St. Paul said, “*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us,*”⁴ the Church participates in the Sacrifice of Prayer. Here, petitions are lifted up before the Lord on behalf of rulers, those in need, and those who cannot pray for themselves. This is our response to the Word of God. Petitions, requests, thanksgivings and prayers are often drawn from the Word of God for the day.

From the prayer of the Church, the Exhortation is read out loud by the Celebrant. This teaching declaration, composed first by Dr. Martin Luther in the Reformation, stands to bring the coming realities of that which God is doing through the Sacrament of the Altar into our ears. Because of their value in teaching what God is doing in His Sacrament of the Altar, your pastors have determined to continue to declare those words as part of the preparation for every Divine Service. They reinforce the biblical realities that the Lord’s Supper is no mere memorial feast; not

³ Cf. *II Corinthians* 9:7.

⁴ *Philippians* 3:17, *ESV*.

simply a spiritual meal; but a very real participation in the True Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – crucified, risen and ascended to the Right Hand of the Father. The Exhortation is read so that all understand, as is humanly possible, that those who partake of the Supper confess the same realities, and that those who do not truly break communion – fellowship – with us.

Therefore, to prepare us as we receive His Means of Grace, God moves the Church from Open Absolution, to Open Proclamation to Closed Communion. The power and danger to unbelieving or not rightly confessing people in this touch of the Lord's Body and Blood in, with and under the consecrated Bread and Wine is reinforced. For those who believe and confess rightly, God's gifts of forgiveness of sins and strengthening to life everlasting are declared to lead us to receive Him in the Faith.

Having been refreshed in our understanding of God's Work for us in the Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament, let us respond to the gifts which God has and will give to us by offering back to Him in the Faith part of the 51st Psalm....(Please stand if you are able.)

TEACHING SERVICE Point IV:
Introduction to the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar.

(Please be seated.) God has brought us to the second high point of His Service to us. Soon, with His Words, Jesus will come to us in the means He chose. It is a mark of the True Church that these Words of our Lord not be clouded by sacrificial language or covered over with prayers, or music or action that do not propel the hearers to comprehend the divine realities before us. As the Sacrament of the Altar is one of God's means of Grace, it ranks in order of God's emphasis with equal value to Holy Absolution, Baptism and the proclamation of God's Word.

With Jesus' Word, Bread and Wine become His Means to impart His Grace. It is Jesus' Word, spoken through the men whom He places into the Office which He established, which "institutes" (hear that rightly) the Sacrament of the Altar. Therefore, all who receive the Bread and Wine set aside by His Word for holy use receive Jesus sacramentally in, with and under those elements.

From this Real Presence of our Lord, repentant, believing, confessing Christians receive forgiveness, life and salvation. From this Real Presence of our Lord, unrepentant, unbelieving, unconfessing people, even those who claim to be Christian, receive God's judgment. In the King James Version of the Bible, as in other translations in similar words, it is taught therein that the latter type of person *eateth and drinketh damnation to [themselves], not discerning the Lord's body.*⁵ This sacred meal is for sinners who know their sins, desire to turn from them, recognize the Real Presence of Jesus in the Supper and understand that they are also, as one Body,

⁵ I Corinthians 11:29.

confessing identical truths with all who commune physically with them at the Lord's Table in a given location (congregation).

To reinforce the reality of the Lord's Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, before the Words of Our Lord, the Preface, Proper Preface and the Our Father are sung or spoken. The Preface sets the tone for this Service with reminders of Who is present, and our biblical response to Him. Next, the Proper Preface is chanted or spoken. This is the section whose theme is tied to the season, as you will hear the Ordinary Time (green season) theme chanted today.

From that, the Church joins the pastor in the three-fold "holy" from the vision of Isaiah. In this order of service it is placed where it is to remind us that heaven is being opened for us, and that our lips will soon be touched by the Lord. We learn afresh that we are actually joining the heavenly chorus before the slain, risen and ascended Lord.

From our participation in Isaiah's vision, the Church prays with our Lord, Jesus, in the Word He gave us to address the Father. Flowing from that Table prayer, Jesus' own Words, which established His Holy Meal for repentant sinners, are spoken.

After the Lord's Word has been connected to the elements, the congregation sings of Him Who is present, in, with and under the Bread and Wine. There, as your voice echoes the Word of God from John, Chapter 1, the Spirit opens your heart to behold Him as the Lamb of God, slain, risen and ascended. Here, the Lord first communes the men who will serve Him to you, from His hand. They, we, receive as you receive, from the same hand and mouth whom Jesus has already come to and cleansed.

The distribution of God's gifts continues. Through earthly elements of simple bread and wine, the Lord of All touches you. As table after table

reclines in the Presence of Jesus, the congregation often sings words which are most often tied to the readings of the day or to the theme of the Lord's Feast.

Finally, when all have received the Body and Blood of Jesus, or a reminder of the grace God gave them in Holy Baptism, or words to encourage them to come to the Font, some of the remaining elements are consumed and some veiled. The congregation sings of the reality that God has truly been beheld by us. We proclaim that we truly are free to depart in His peace.

As we are prepared to go, the congregation rises to give thanks to God through a man who again stands in their stead. Having joined their thoughts to the assistant's words, the congregation gives thanks and receives a Trinitarian blessing. There we are reminded that, in Christ, the whole countenance of God smiles upon us, and we live! We are freed under the Gospel to depart – having heard of God's forgiveness in Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of our sins.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Let us now receive God's gifts anew in the Sacrament of the Altar.
Please stand.

Trinity XXIII (*LSB One-year series*)

Psalm 111; Proverbs 8:11-22; Philippians 3:17-21; St. Matthew 22:15-22

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria