



“Why do we have communion bread that tastes like the stuff the dentist has you bite on when he takes x-rays?”

(And other assorted questions about the Lord’s Supper)

I couldn’t help but laugh when one of the confirmation students asked the question listed above. I laughed, because he had put into words a thought that I’m guessing most of you have had at one point or other about the wafers we (and most churches) use for communion. One of the things I love about young people and kids is that they aren’t afraid to put into words things the rest of us have often thought - but never voiced out loud. .

I had previously talked with the class about the fact that we use unleavened bread (no yeast) because the original Lord’s Supper was a Passover meal and the bread of the Passover was made without yeast (per God’s instructions in Exodus 12). My answer to the “wafers that taste like cardboard” question was this *“Because that’s what the church-supply places sell in mass quantities, so the wafers we use are easy to get and inexpensive.”*

As I reflected on that answer, it didn’t strike me as a very good one, so I decided this was an opportune time to try something better. As a result, the confirmation class will be *making* the unleavened bread for our use in communion for Thanksgiving Eve worship. Following that service, each confirmation student and their families will take a turn at making and providing the unleavened communion bread for subsequent Sunday communion services. Anyone else who would like to take a turn providing the unleavened communion bread after that will be welcome to do so.

Why offer communion at the beginning of Confirmation not the end?

Following a number of sessions designed to help the students understand what is going on in communion, the incoming confirmation class was invited to partake of the Lord’s Supper with their families on Reformation Sunday. The above question was a very natural one, since the previous practice was to commune only after getting confirmed. It was a change that our Elders Team had approved way back when Living Word was chartered, but this is the first year since that time that we were able to implement the change as this is the first year we’ve started with a totally new group of students. Here’s a sampling of things we looked at in making the decision:

+ Lutherans have always referred to the Sacrament of the Altar as a “Means of *Grace*.”

‘Grace’ is a ‘gift’ - not something we can earn. Thus, having communion as the “goal” of confirmation definitely sends the wrong signal that participation in the Lord’s Supper is something that must be earned. (Which easily leads to another very wrong assumption - that salvation must be earned as well!)

+ Faith in Jesus is the basic thing that makes a person “worthy” to partake of the meal:

Martin Luther, in answer to the question, “*What makes a person worthy to partake of the sacrament?*” said this in his *Small Catechism*, “Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But the person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*’ But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “for you” require all hearts to believe.”

+ The Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11 that worthy partaking of the Lord’s Supper also includes the ability to examine (or test) oneself.

The basic “test questions” are certainly not beyond the grasp of middle-school age students:

1. Am I a sinner in need of God’s forgiveness?
2. Do I believe that Jesus died to forgive me and is my only way to heaven?
3. Do I want His forgiveness for all my sins?
4. Do I want His help to quit repeating all my sins?
5. Do I believe that Jesus’ body and blood are given in this bread and wine, and that through them I personally receive His forgiveness?
6. Have I forgiven all those who have sinned against me?

The benefits God delivers in the Sacrament of the Altar are ones we all need, and that definitely includes Middle Schoolers.

- Personal forgiveness of your sin
- Strengthening of our faith in Jesus
- The Very Presence of Jesus coming to dwell in you through His body and blood - with *His* power for all that life throws at us.

Why do we say that we receive Jesus’ body and blood in communion?

Another great question.... The communion meal looks and tastes like bread and wine - and it *was* bread and wine that Jesus used when He instituted the Lord’s Supper as part of sharing the Passover Meal with His disciples the night before He died on the cross to pay for our sin. But we believe that we receive not *just* bread and wine, but also Jesus’ body and blood along with the bread and wine. We believe this simply because of Jesus’ words “*This is my body... this is my blood..*” as He instituted the meal. (See Matthew 26). Note: we do *not* believe that the bread and wine *changes into* Jesus’ body and blood, but that Jesus’ body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net