

Wednesday in Judica  
Text: John 6:48-58  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

✠In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

God is a poet. And being God, he does not use just words for his poems, but real people and historical events. He pens his works of beauty by raising up kingdoms and destroying nations, by flood and storm, by miraculous deliverance in battle and by scattering the strong. Most of all he loves to rhyme – he loves to show in shadows beforehand what his real plan will be. Thus the past rhymes with the future; the prophecy rhymes with the fulfillment. And so it is in our Gospel lesson tonight as Jesus speaks about the Lord's Supper by first speaking about a prophecy of the Lord's Supper, a past shadow of the Lord's Supper: manna in the desert.

The fathers of Israel ate manna in the desert. The word 'manna' simply means "What is it?" It has this name because the people could not determine what it was. It looked like nothing spectacular – in fact it looked as fine as snow flakes and would melt by midday if it were not gathered. Yet its taste was full and sweet and satisfying and a jar of it was enough to nourish and strengthen a full-grown man for a whole day. This manna was sent by God at the command of his Word; it was not the creation of men. This manna fed the people of God and gave them all the nourishment they needed.

But as miraculous as this bread that rained down from the sky was, it was just a shadow. It was not the real deal. It was the prophecy of the real deal. For the fathers ate that manna in the desert, and they still died. So now Jesus is here to fulfill the prophecy, to be the substance of the shadow, to show us the rhyme in God's poem. Jesus says that the manna in the desert was pointing forward to his flesh and blood, the real bread that comes down from heaven. If you eat his flesh and drink his blood, you have life and he will raise you up at the last day.

And look how well this Lord's Supper does rhyme with the manna in the desert. As the manna didn't look like anything special, so also the Lord's Supper. To the eyes of sight it appears to be just bread and wine. But the eyes of faith see the Word of Christ when he says, "Take, eat, this is my body. . . Take, drink, this is

my blood." Faith knows that what Christ says goes. Thus, Luther says in the Catechism what the Lord's Supper is: It is the true body and blood of Christ Jesus instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink.

As the manna in the desert sustained and nourished the people, so our Lord's body and blood in the Supper sustain and nourish us. For we are weak and sinful. If we have to stand on our own, we are lost. We need to be repaired, refreshed, and renewed. The Supper does this – because in the Supper Jesus gives us the only thing that can renew us: Himself. Jesus says that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood have life in them – and not life for a day as the manna in the desert gave, but life eternal, life in the resurrection from the dead on the last day. For on that last day, our bodies which have been fed with Christ's risen body will be raised to everlasting life with him.

This is why the Lord's Supper is the center of our worship. It's why the altar is in the middle of the chancel drawing all eyes to itself. It's why this pulpit is in the shape of a chalice – it's a reminder that no matter how well (or badly) a pastor preaches, his sermon is not the main thing in the service. The main thing is always Jesus. And Jesus comes to us in the most personal, the most direct way in the Lord's Supper where he gives us the same body and blood that were born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, were crucified for our sins and raised for our salvation. We need this gift because we are surrounded by temptations and hardship, by sin within and without. We always need as much Jesus as we can get – for we are surrounded by death but he is Life.

That is why in the book of Acts, and in the early days of the Church, and in the time of the Reformation, our churches have typically made the Lord's Supper available every Sunday to those who desire it. Our Lutheran Confessions state that this is our practice as you can see in the bulletin tonight. This is so because we always want to offer the gifts that Jesus has to give. We never want to deny these gifts to a member of our fellowship who wishes to receive them. If the gifts are not offered, and someone does want to receive them, then that person is denied the gifts precisely because they are not offered.

That is why our Synod in convention and our District President have encouraged us here at Trinity to offer the opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper every Sunday. And I couldn't agree more. That's why the Lord's Supper has been so central in my preaching and why I never tire of leading Bible studies and devotions on this topic, indeed, this Sunday's Bible Class will explore this gift even further. The Lord's Supper is a Gospel gift – Luther even said, "The Sacrament of

the Altar is the Gospel" – for it gives forgiveness, life, and salvation to all who receive this gift with a believing heart. And thus I'm very excited that we will now be offering this gift on every Sunday to those who wish to receive it.

I say "to those who wish to receive it" because you must never feel forced to come to the Lord's Supper. Since the Lord's Supper is Gospel, there can be no compulsion with it whatsoever. There is nothing wrong with deciding that you would like to receive the Lord's Supper only twice a month – or only once a month. You are free to do as your devotion dictates. I will not think less of you if you decide to stay in the pew rather than come forward at a given celebration of the Lord's Supper. Nor will I think better of you if you decide the opposite. Here there must be perfect freedom in Christ. No one is forced, but all are invited. Now you will have the freedom to decide exactly how often you would like to receive the Lord's gift of his true body and blood, because now this gift will be offered every Sunday.

And what a gift it is! What love our Lord Jesus shows for us! He poured out his life for us on the cross and now offers us that very same life, his life, in his real body and blood, the fruits of the tree of his cross. In the face of such love who cannot cry out with the hymnist:

I come, O Savior, to Thy Table,  
 For weak and weary is my soul;  
 Thou, Bread of Life, alone art able  
 To satisfy and make me whole:  
 Lord may Thy body and Thy blood  
 Be for my soul the highest good. Amen.

✠In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ  
 Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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