

Amen!

*What More is There to Say But Amen?* That the title of the 1996 autobiography of the man who had been the speaker for *The Lutheran Hour* for 33 years. We've been through all 4 questions from the 6<sup>th</sup> Chief Part of our Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar. What more is there to say but Amen? Luther's 3<sup>rd</sup> Chief Part defines what this transliterated word from Hebrew, to Greek, to English means: "yes, it shall be so." If you think about it "amen" is over all the Lord does, gives, and says in this Sacrament. He proclaims from the Body and Blood on this altar, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." And we respond with one drawn out "amen." To the invitation to eat His body and drink His blood, to the actual eating and drinking, and to being dismissed strengthened and preserved in the true faith by it, we respond at the rail: Amen!

Amen! Is what we say to the fact that the Lord's Supper is a will. The 1988 confessional Lutheran translation of the New Testament, *God's Word to the Nations*, translated our text that way: Where NIV translates Jesus saying: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" and other translations have "new testament." GWN makes it clear what the Lord's Supper is: "this cup is the last will and testament in My blood." Amen! It's a will. Only the testor, the one making the will, can ever change it, and once he's dead, a will can't be altered. Jesus wrote this will on the night He was betrayed. The day before He died. Once He died, it was as if written in stone. He left His children His body and blood.

Yes, yes it shall be so. This can't be picture language. This is My body can't be understood as "This represents, is a sign, is a symbol for My body which is only physically up in heaven." You can't use figurative speech in a will. Try it. A lawyer won't let you leave "Old Blue" your favorite shotgun to someone. He will make you specify the gauge, make, model, and probably the serial number. Men will not permit vagueness or innuendo in their wills. How much less the Holy God. He wants no one ever to doubt that of all the things God Almighty could leave His Church on earth, He wished not to leave money, property, jewels, but His body and blood. The same body and blood He gave and shed on Calvary.

I told the confirmands recently that when Luther met with the man who believed Communion was a symbol of Jesus' body and blood, he had written on chalk under the table cloth: "This is My body." Periodically, Luther lifted the cloth to remember the point at issue is what Jesus said. As much as Luther clung to this short sentence, he said of another Scripture that even though 10,000 devils would jump up and down that it isn't the body and blood, this one Bible verse could rebuke them. That Scripture is 1 Cor 10:16, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?" The NASB describes Communion as a "sharing" of Jesus' body and blood. NIV describes it as a "participation" in His body and blood. The EHV a "communion" and the margin says "or joint partaking" of these are all translating the same Greek Word: *koinōnia*. Communion is not about feeling chummy with Jesus or others at the rail. It's an objective sharing with Jesus and them of the same thing. And Paul says it's not sharing bread and wine but Jesus' body and blood.

If Jesus' body and blood are only in heaven after His Ascension, then all we have here is a Barmecide Feast. This is from *The Arabian Nights*. A rich man, Barmecide, invites poor people to a sumptuous meal on plates of gold and cups of silver. But there is nothing on or in those dishes. It's all pretend. And that's what the Lord's Supper is for the last 2,000 years if there's no body or blood here. You can pretend there is; you can believe there is, but you're not actually communing with, participating in, or sharing these things. But that's what you and I need. Bread and wine, even blessed by Jesus, are no antidote for the death coursing through our bodies. I can pretend all I want that my sins are really covered, but bread and wine can't cover them. Our first parent's ingested poison. Do you think plain bread and wine does anything to counteract that? Arrowroot is a late 17<sup>th</sup> century word for a potato like vegetable of the Caribbean. It absorbed poison from arrow wounds. It's name is really an alteration of another word *aru-aru* which literally means "meal of meals" (*Oxford Dict. Of Word Histories*, 30). What a fine name for the Lord's Supper,

Listen to how 4<sup>th</sup> century Gregory of Nyssa describes it: "Those who have been tricked into taking poison offset its harmful effect by another drug. The remedy, moreover, just like the poison, has to enter the system, so that its remedial effect may thereby spread through the whole body. Similarly, having tasted the poison, that is the fruit, that dissolved our nature, we were necessarily in need of something to reunite it. Such a remedy had to enter into us, so that it might by its counteraction undo the harm the body has already encountered from the poison. And what is this remedy? Nothing else than the body that proved itself superior to death and became the source of our life" (*ACC. OT. I. 78*). Luther said the Lord's Supper acted the opposite of regular food. "Perishable food is transformed into the body which eats it; this food, however, transforms the person who eats it into what it is itself, and makes him like itself, spiritual, alive, and eternal!" (Stephenson, *The Lord's Supper*, 223, fn 67). So, how does Jesus' life, the life He lived keeping all of God's laws in our place and the life He forfeited to pay for our sins, how does that life enter into us? Yes, in Words, Water, but even more tangibly, more physically, when we eat His body and drink His blood with our physical mouths.

Amen! The Lord's Supper is not a Barmecide feast, not picture language, but a last will and testament of Jesus leaving us His body and blood. Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, I think, no Lutheran hymnal referred to distributing the bread and wine but always the body and blood. You know your Catechism well-enough that we believe as Scripture says that after the Words of Institution what is now present on that altar is not only bread and wine but also Jesus' body and blood. Since all 4 things are present it's not wrong to name them according to their natural side as opposed to their supernatural side. However, referring to them consistently as the body and blood helps remind and warn us. As Moses was commanded to remove his sandals in the presence of the Burning Bush, so when we think and speak of distributing Jesus' body and

blood we're reminded we're on holy ground. And you know, we wouldn't be bowing and kneeling if it were just plain bread and wine. That would be idolatrous. No, we're bowing, kneeling, reverencing, Jesus' body and blood that are present once more among us.

Luther said this: "Our opinion is that the body is in such a way with or in the bread that it is truly received with the bread. Whatever the bread suffers or does is also true of the body. Thus, it is rightly said of the body of Christ that it is carried, given, received, eaten, when the bread is carried, given, received, eaten. That is the meaning of 'This is my body'" (*This is My Body*, 250). The liturgical gestures mentioned above help us keep Jesus' presence in mind, and so are useful. They ought not be done away with entirely lest you tread roughly or indeed blasphemously on holy ground. Martin Chemnitz, a principle author of our later Confessions put it: Only a someone who denies it's really Christ's body and blood would refuse to bow before the consecrated elements. "No one, therefore, denies that Christ, God and man, truly and substantially present in His divine and human nature in the action of the Lord's Supper, should be worshiped in spirit and in truth, except someone who, with the Sacramentarians, either denies or harbors doubt concerning the presence of Christ in the Supper" (*Examination*, 2, 279). It's true; one can get carried away with liturgical gestures. So, be like Luther, and leave them out sometimes. Luther was in the habit of confessing before communing, but he would forego it to spite the Devil.

Amen! Jesus left a last will and testament, so that we might have no doubt what He left us. Amen! This bread, this cup communicate, share, give not just bread and wine but Jesus' body and blood. Amen! You misuse this Sacrament and Paul says you're not sinning against bread and wine but Jesus' body and blood. Could 1 Cor. 11:27 be any clearer? "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup...in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." During Luther's time stories were told of unworthy communicants communing and the 'Bread' starting to bleed. I know why. Paul plainly warns there are physical effects to misusing the body and blood of Jesus. And those churches who have His body and blood and commune whoever wants to, i.e. open Communion, are under his judgement. So, where are their many sick and weak people and how many of them have died? Just as baptized babies don't glow but are still reborn. Just as you don't see the malignant sin sliding off the absolved person's back, doesn't mean it didn't. Likewise sickness, weakness, and death aren't always visible but Paul says they are there.

But pursue this the other way, Paul says eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood unworthily has bad physical effects, so rightly eating and drinking has good physical effects. Luther says there's not just forgiveness here but life. Here's what we say we believe: "We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also" (LC, V, 68). But physical effects aren't enough. The Lord didn't want us to live forever in a damned state. So this Sacrament doesn't just convey life today but life forever. This too is an ancient teaching of the Church. 5<sup>th</sup> century Cyril of Alexandria said, "the earthly body is brought back by that food to immortality, to be raised to life in the last day" (Krauth, *Con. Ref.*, 828). His body and His blood used not misused is forgiveness that is eaten and drank, for life today, and for living forever. What's left to say to that but, Amen!

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