

Heart of Worship: “Do This!”

A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

How well do you do when it comes to following the doctor’s orders? The dentist who tells you to floss once a day or who tells you to stop eating so many sweets or who tells you to wear your mouth-guard at night to cut down on the teeth grinding? The surgeon who tells you to keep changing those dressings so that infection doesn’t set in or who tells you to wait this long after surgery before trying to start running or training for that sport again? The family physician who tells you to take your medication and vitamins twice a day or who tells you to follow the prescription for that antibiotic? How well do you do?

What happens if you don’t? Right, usually not good, maybe even do more damage, maybe irreparable damage. And, of course, it almost always ends up costing you more money for more treatments, doesn’t it?

How well do you do at following instructions when it comes to the Lord’s Supper here? And I don’t mean instructions on how to line up (which again, if you’ve forgotten or don’t know, it’s come down the center and break off to the side you’re sitting on). But rather, how well do you do at getting yourself prepared to receive the Lord’s Supper?

What happens if you don’t?

If you were here a couple of weeks back, when our Circuit Pastor, Pastor Guenther, led worship, do you remember what he said in his announcement before Communion? One phrase which stuck out in my mind was how he invited those to come forward who were “properly prepared.”

Properly prepared... now what does that mean? What does it mean to be properly prepared to receive the Lord’s Supper? We are going to be celebrating the Lord’s Supper today, so what better time to find out how than now? So, what again does it mean to be properly prepared?

You know, Martin Luther addresses that very question in his Small Catechism, where he wrote, **“Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament? Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words, “Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” But who ever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words “for you” require nothing but hearts that believe.”**

So, first and foremost, the one thing which makes us properly prepared is faith in Jesus. But then here, in our verses, Paul goes on and gives us another important key to being properly prepared to come... **“everyone ought to examine themselves.”**

Do you know what that means, what this examination entails? It means looking past the surface, beyond the mindset, “I go because that’s what I’m supposed to do, or I go because that’s what everyone else is doing.”

Examining yourself means looking inward, looking at your heart, your motivation, and taking the time to ask yourself some serious questions, like, **“Am I really sorry for my sins? Do I truly repent of them?”** **“Do I believe that Jesus paid for my all my sins, all of them, through his life, death, and resurrection?”**

Do I believe in “Real Presence” ...that here, in the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives me his very body and his very blood together with the bread and the wine...all that for the forgiveness of my sins?” “Do I intend to use the strengthening I receive in the Lord’s Supper to resist the temptation to go on sinning?”

And then, doing all of that before partaking...checking yourself, checking your motivation, checking your faith...that’s being properly prepared.

Now, maybe that sounds like more work than what you’ve done in the past...just to come to the Lord’s Supper. Is it really that important or that big of a deal? Do I really need to put the time and effort into making sure I’m properly prepared for communion?

Short answer...yes. Just think of it this way. Whose supper is it? Right, the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is the one who instituted it, who established it, and he’s the one who’s set down guidelines for how he wants us to come.

It would be like receiving an invitation to a black tie event, being too cheap to rent a tux, so instead you show up in a polo and your nicest jeans. Or, you’re a little fancier, so you scavenge through the back of your closet, pull out your grandpa’s old suit coat from the 1960’s (you know, the one with the classic leather elbow pads), match it up with a pair of nice khakis, put on whatever novelty tie you have lying around (because, of course you don’t really wear ties, but always get funny ones as gag gifts for Christmas), throw on your loafers, and then make your way to the party.

Now, before you got the chance to even feel out of place, odds are the “bouncer” manning the doors wouldn’t even let you in, whether your name was on that guest list or not. And it would be fair. It’s their party, they set down the guidelines for attire, and you didn’t follow it.

You know, Jesus doesn’t set restrictions for what we should wear when coming to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. But he does tell us how he wants us to look on the inside, again, as ones who share the same faith in Jesus, who believe the words he speaks in the Lord’s Supper, and who have put the effort into examining ourselves to make sure we’re properly prepared to receive the precious, priceless blessings he gives therein.

Friends, I stand here guilty. I know the times I’ve been far too casual about the Lord’s Supper, standing in line to come up, and realizing, “Oh no, I didn’t pray before coming up. I didn’t work through examination questions, like the ones on page 156 at the front of my hymnal. I didn’t take the time at home to think about what wonderful thing would happen here at worship today and truly think about its significance.” Or...mindlessly standing before the table, receiving my bread and wine, with a thousand other things on my mind...everything except Jesus’ very body and blood, given and shed for me (such sweet gospel). Or...returning to my seat, my mind still distraught and anguished by the guilt of my sin, as if the forgiveness Jesus gives through this Sacrament had no effect on me. I know the times I haven’t been properly prepared.

Maybe that’s been you, too. Probably at least once or twice.

And it’s a big deal. Look at what Paul writes, **“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”** Convicting, isn’t it?

Well, if there's that much work needing to go into being properly prepared, and if I'll feel so guilty I can't come or won't be able to come the way Jesus commands me to, why even attempt to come?

Martin Luther writes about this, **"We have the clear text in the very words of Christ, "DO THIS in remembrance of me." These are words that instruct and command us, urging all those who want to be Christians to partake of the sacrament. Therefore, whoever wants to be a disciple of Christ – it is those to whom he is speaking here, must faithfully hold to this sacrament, not from compulsion, forced by humans, but to obey and please the Lord Christ."**

Simply, Jesus says "Do this." "Come to the Lord's Supper." "Come often." "Come, believing in the words I speak to you here." "Come, examining your hearts and your motivation." "Come, being properly prepared." "Do this!"

And we haven't always.

But friends, instead of being frightened off or deterred from approaching God's table, listen instead to his words, **"This is my body, which is given for you...this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you."**

A person who hasn't been as prepared as Jesus wants them to, a person who may consider themselves "too sinful" to dare approach God, that is the "you" Jesus gives his body to eat and his blood to drink. You are the very person to whom Jesus says, "Do this." You are the very person Jesus wants up here.

He's got a new covenant to make with you here. You see, receiving the bread and the wine, Christ's body and his blood in this sacrament is a vivid preaching of the sweet gospel...that very body, that same, perfect body and perfect life Jesus willing offered as a sacrifice for your sins on the cross...that very blood, the same, precious and priceless blood Jesus shed on the cross for your forgiveness, just as God's Word says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." His body and blood, the covenant which God gives you here to signify him imparting salvation to you, sealed and paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus' body and the shedding of his blood, both real, both present here (in a miraculous). That's some of the purest gospel there! And it's for you!

And because the Lord gives his true body and true blood here in the Sacrament (such a precious gift to behold and to receive), it only makes sense and it's only fitting for us to willing and gladly do this (what Jesus commands)...to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. Sure, it may seem like a lot to keep in mind for the Lord's Supper (the preparations, the examination, making sure your heart is right), but friends, the payoff is beyond incredible...for you...for the forgiveness of your sins.

So now, how can you get the most out of this part of our worship? Follow Jesus' command and "Do this." Come! Come often (as often as you sin and need forgiveness, which is every time we offer the Lord's Supper here)! Come as you are (a sinner who is never too sinful or too guilty to approach the Lord's table)! And come, having taken the time beforehand to properly prepare and examine yourself.

For that, the list of questions I posed earlier is a good place to start. The questions on page 156 of the front of your hymnals is even better. The best I've found so far is this (Questions at the end of Luther's Small Catechism). More extensive, still not very long to go through, but they get your heart and your mind right and ready to receive the new covenant Jesus freely gives! And, just a side note, if you don't

have this Catechism but would like the set of questions, let me know, and I'd be happy to get them for you.

Again, all this because we want to receive this wonderful gift in a manner God finds worthy.

Maybe one last point, but while on the one hand, Jesus tells us, "Do this" for the Lord's Supper, there are times he says, and so we also have to tell people, "Don't do this." Don't take the Lord's Supper. Besides eating the bread and drinking the wine in an unworthy manner, Paul also cautions against this, ***"For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on themselves."***

You know, there's a reason why there's an announcement in the worship folder and why I take the time to announce our congregation's practice of close communion. To those who believe the same thing (and not just about the Lord's Supper but about every teaching of the Bible), Jesus says, "Do this. Come."

But to those who don't, God's Word is clear and rather blunt that they would be eating and drinking in an unworthy manner and so are eating and drinking judgment on their own souls.

I don't want a part in that. Neither do you. And that's why we encourage getting people into our Bible Information Classes, so people, who aren't part of our church, can learn what our church teaches, be able to publicly confess their faith, and then, finally, through their own confirmation, be able to enjoy the same blessings of the Lord's Supper we do.

But until that happens, we can be ready to express our faith and our unity in faith as we politely and lovingly ask people to refrain from coming so we can prevent them from possibly doing serious irreparable damage to their own souls.

Friends, I think we'd all agree it'd be foolish not to follow the doctor's prescriptions or directions, especially when something as precious as our health is at stake. There's more at stake when it comes to our souls. So, when Jesus says, "Do this," we will. Friends, the Lord offers you the precious gift of his forgiveness here and asks you to properly prepare. So, come! Come as you are! Come, believing in his body and blood.. Come, having examined yourself and be properly prepared. Come, eat and drink, and rejoice in the forgiveness that is "for you." Amen.