



Emmanuel Lutheran Church
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April 8, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we go through this time of separation, there is much that I miss: visiting those in the nursing homes or unable to get out, comforting those in the hospital, the fellowship after service, seeing the children at Sunday school, teaching Bible class, visiting members in their homes, and giving you God's gifts in the Divine Service.

I've also missed the somberness of Lent (along with the good dinners) and its build up to Holy Week. For six weeks, we've refrained from singing the Hymn of Praise and the Alleluias with the joyful expectation of getting them back on Easter Day. The Alleluias will be raised from their graves on Easter, but instead of singing them as a congregation we'll be doing so alone or with family. That doesn't mean we shouldn't shout them with hearts full of praise! As one member told me, "The church may be empty, but so is the tomb!" We still praise the Lord for His resurrection and for crushing Death under His foot.

Maundy Thursday just isn't going to be the same this year. We'll still strip the Altar; except this year we won't have to remove the communion ware. This is one of the hardest things for me to give up and I miss receiving the Lord's Supper every week. Historically, there have been times when Holy Communion wasn't available every week, or even every month. In the early days of American Lutheranism, the pastors on horseback would only get to a congregation every six or eight weeks. Oh, the joy at the return of the pastor and the celebration of Communion! When we can finally resume public worship, we'll experience that joy ourselves.

I have a couple of things that I would like you to keep in mind until we gather as a church family once again. First, if you feel comfortable inviting me into your home, I will be glad to bring the Lord's Supper to you, any time and as often as you like. On the other hand, I completely understand if you are unnerved by the virus and don't want any visitors. Let me know (657-3056) and I'll serve you any way that I can.

Second, there are videos from Lutheran churches circulating on Facebook encouraging people to have communion privately using their own bread and wine (or juice, if they want). The pastors are giving instructions on how to consecrate your own bread and wine as you watch them on the screen or when you're by yourself. I will put this as delicately as I can: **Do not do this!** This is unbiblical and is rejected by our Lutheran teachings.

Paul says, ***"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."*** (1 Corinthians 4:1) In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession (a

statement of Lutheran beliefs written in 1530 by Martin Luther and the Reformers), they write there is **“one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people.”** Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession, says, **“no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called [as a pastor].”**

Paul and the Reformers simply mean that in the Church there is a certain orderliness as to how things are done. It's not because pastors are holier than those who are not ordained. It's because without order there is chaos, and chaos is unbecoming of Christ's Church. Paul writes, ***“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace”*** and ***“All things should be done decently and in order.”*** (1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40)

Yes, it is disappointing that we cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper as He desires and as we wish. That is a result of living in a sinful, fallen world. He hasn't left us without gifts though! We still cling to His Word as the very voice of God speaking forgiveness, encouragement, and peace. We still remember our baptism and how these transferred us out of Satan's kingdom into God's. The washing with the water and the Word sustains us our faith and forgives our sins. The gifts of His Word and your Baptism ensure you that He will watch over you and keep you in the one, true faith until life everlasting.

Finally, I want to leave you with a blessing from Paul's letter to the Colossian congregation: ***“May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** (Colossians 1:11-14)

We are apart, and yet, as members of the Church we are always together, for we are knitted one into another as the Body of Christ. May the Lord keep you steadfast until the day we can gather at the altar and shout our Alleluias in holy unison.

In Christ,

Pastor Don Peterson