

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 8/15/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, August 16 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the poor and needy. Pray that they might receive assistance that will lift them out of their poverty. Ask GOD to help you support services that will support those who struggle financially.*

In the early Christian Church, Holy Communion was only offered at Easter. One of the main reasons people flocked to churches on Easter was to receive this sacrament tied to the death and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST. But because many missed this once-a-year offering of forgiveness the Church added Christmas as a second occasion to receive Communion. Because of the desire of many for a more regular offering, Holy Communion became a “first Sunday of the month” sacrament. From there, it became twice a month and now, in many congregations, every Sunday. (By the way, Martin Luther, when asked how often one should take Communion, replied, “Once a day, but not more than once a day.” He didn’t want people to become so caught up in dashing to church to receive forgiveness that they were of no earthly good.)

Since Holy Communion includes the announcement of forgiveness of sins, the Church began including “Confession and Forgiveness” on the Sundays when Communion was not offered. Many may remember coming for Communion the first Sunday and then beginning worship with the Confession and Forgiveness on the other Sundays. As the frequency of Communion being offered increased, some churches continued to offer Confession and Forgiveness as well. On those Sundays, you began worship with corporate Confession followed by the “absolution” or announcement of forgiveness of sins by the pastor, and later in the service you came to receive forgiveness again in Holy Communion. (What were people doing between the first hymn and the Apostles’ Creed that they needed to come for forgiveness again in the same service?)

In college, I had a friend who was raised in a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod congregation. One Sunday, the college campus Lutheran pastor decided to move from offering Communion every other week to weekly. My friend did not know this and when she arrived and found out Communion was going to be part of the service, she turned to leave. I asked her why she was going, and she explained that she could not take communion because she wasn’t worthy. She had been taught that she had to recite the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed (both of which we do in worship) and examine herself under the Ten Commandments before she could take Holy Communion. The campus pastor heard her give her reason for leaving and began to explain that the reason we come for Communion is because we are unworthy of GOD’S mercy and love. He told her that if she was “worthy,” she wouldn’t need communion. We are blessed to be able to come to the Table in our unworthiness to receive what GOD brings to us in the Body and Blood of JESUS CHRIST.

This past week in one of our Bible study classes, the question was asked, “What about Confession before the Forgiveness of Communion?” It’s a great question and I began to think about repentance before forgiveness and how many of us have drifted away from thinking about our need for Holy Communion. My friend was right that thinking about the Commandments is a good way of recognizing our need for grace. Yet, I suspect that many don’t consider why the sacrament is necessary for our spiritual well-being when they partake in Communion. We do, though, act out that “confession

and repentance” by simply coming forward. The invitation to the LORD’S Table includes a naming of our unfitness to come before the LORD along with the invitation to come anyway. So, when we come, when we reach out to receive the sacrament, we are confessing our need for GOD’S grace. It is not as formal as the “Confession and Forgiveness,” but it is our confession, nonetheless. By coming to worship, to the sacrament, we are admitting that we desperately need what only GOD can offer. Our responses and prayers in worship are part of the way that we acknowledge and celebrate that GOD has, once again, shown us mercy and love in the name of CHRIST JESUS.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey