

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/17/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 18 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for all across the world who are affected by the extreme heat of this season. Ask that GOD through us and others provide suitable shelter and hydration to all in need. Pray for diminishing of excessive heat and for safety during this time.*

Sunday saw the somewhat rare occurrence where both Lutheran Sacraments were celebrated in worship on the same day. The word “Sacrament” comes from the same root as “sacred” which means “holy.” “Holy,” in turn, means “special” or “set apart.” A Sacrament is a rite of worship where GOD’S blessing is profoundly offered and received.

Lutherans have two Sacraments while Roman Catholics have seven. Most other denominations also have two, though some have just one and others have none. In the Lutheran Church, there are three requirements for a Sacrament: 1) it has to have been commanded by JESUS; 2) it must include two visible signs (things you can see and touch); and 3) it must include the “means of grace” or the “announcement of forgiveness.” JESUS commanded us to baptize when HE said, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT.” HE commanded us to share the meal of the LORD’S Supper when HE said, “Do this in remembrance of ME.” The Roman Catholics also include among their Sacraments marriage and holy orders (becoming a priest or a nun), but JESUS never told us to go and get married (though HE attended at least one and probably many weddings) or to enter the clergy field. Obviously, water in Baptism and wine and bread in Communion are the visible signs. In marriage, the ring would be the visible sign but, again, JESUS never commanded us to be married. And confession and absolution, another Roman Catholic Sacrament, has no item to touch or see. Finally, forgiveness is announced in Baptism when the pastor says, “I baptize you for the forgiveness of sins in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY SPIRIT.” In Communion, JESUS’ words are repeated, “This cup is the new covenant in MY blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.” Marriage and confirmation have no announcement of forgiveness. (In fact, I think in some cases, marriage can increase sin. Just kidding.)

Four blessings are bestowed in Baptism. First, we are adopted by GOD. Every parent wants the best for their child and the best parent we can have is GOD, so in Baptism, the parents ask GOD to adopt their child. GOD indeed does, but then turns around and gives the child back to the parents to raise as much as possible in the way GOD wants the child raised. Second, we are connected to JESUS’ death and resurrection. As CHRIST was baptized, so in Baptism we are joined to HIS baptism and also HIS death and resurrection, with the promise of life eternal with GOD to those who believe. Baptism is not eternal life insurance so that if you’re baptized you are assured of heaven. Rather, eternal life is a matter of faith. Baptism is one outward sign of the faith that parents and sponsors promise seek to instill in their child. Third, we receive the forgiveness of sins. Roman Catholics teach that Baptism only takes care of original sin, the sin of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Lutherans believe that JESUS’ death atoned for all sin, so that Baptism takes care of all sin—but don’t forget the faith requirement, too. Fourth, we become in Baptism a member of the Body of CHRIST, which is the Church. That means that, as the baptized, you are called and invited to be actively involved in the work of GOD’S Kingdom through the Church.

Communion offers two blessings, albeit blessings that we have also received in Baptism. We are forgiven of sin, and we receive the promise of eternal life. If we've already received those, however, why do it again? Though we are forgiven, we are also very aware of the sins we commit each day. Communion gives us that opportunity to again be assured of that forgiveness and that nothing can separate us from the love of GOD for eternity. One additional benefit that we experience in Communion is that we are connect and united to each other as we come together, acknowledging our need for GOD and GOD'S blessings in CHRIST, and that we part of a larger community gathered together around the table, both in our congregation and across the entire world where other also participate in the LORD'S Supper. The Sacraments are wonderful gifts that JESUS gave to us encourage us, connect us to HIM and to each other, and assure us of the blessings that can only come from GOD, but that are available to all who believe.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey