

“For the Life of the World:”
Receiving Christ’s Gifts of Life in the Divine Service

By Rev. Daniel K. Greg

*“I am the living bread which came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall
give is My flesh, which I shall give **for the life of the world.**”*
(John 6:51, NKJV)

*“Faith is the **divine service** that receives the benefits offered by God. . .
By faith God wishes to be worshiped in this way, that we receive from Him
those things which He promises and offers.”*
(Apology of the Augsburg Confession 4.49)

*“For where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is **life** and salvation.”*
(Luther’s Small Catechism 6.6)

One of my favorite stories from the Gospels is Luke Chapter 7.

A woman who “was a sinner” (v.37) comes to Jesus at the table. Despite her feelings of unworthiness, her shameful public reputation , her anxious thoughts; she knows that she needs to be with Jesus.

Seemingly, she has nothing to offer Jesus. She must use her own repentant tears in sorrow over her sin, her own hair to wash and kiss Jesus’ feet. The ointment may have been any old ointment that she already had, but knew would provide some comfort to her Lord and Savior.

I love these stories: stories of real people, sinners, who need Jesus Christ. When they hear that Jesus is in town or in a certain place, they go there; to see Him, hear Him, touch Him. Sometimes, as with the case of the paralyzed man (Luke 5), these real people must be brought to Jesus by those who love them, as we often must be brought.

Yes, this woman had nothing to bring Jesus but her brokenness. She didn’t even have words for him. Yet Jesus gives her what she needs, even if she doesn’t know it.

Jesus gives this woman the forgiveness of her sins.

“Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (v.48,50).

And it’s done.

They’re gone.

No one will remember them on the Last Day.

What a gift.

Isn't it lovely? Isn't it joyful?

You and I receive these same wonderful gifts in abundance each week in the Divine Service; each day in our home devotions.

The word for "worship service" in the Lutheran tradition is "Divine Service,"



coined by Martin Luther. Using "Divine Service" instead of "worship service" shifts the focus of worship away from our own actions, which often become tiresome, to Jesus Christ's service toward us: the very giving of Himself as the "living bread. . . for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

A Lutheran reformer wrote: "Faith is the *divine service* that receives the benefits offered by God. . . By faith, God wishes to be worshiped in this way, that we receive from Him those things which He promises and offers." (Apology of the Augsburg Confession 4.49).

The ultimate act of worship is therefore faith.

And faith can be seen in the life of this

woman "who was a sinner," yet has been forgiven by Jesus.

She has received Christ's gifts.

She has received the forgiveness of sins.

And "where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is life and salvation" (Luther's Small Catechism 6.6).

Each week, wrought with brokenness and having hurt others, we stumble into our churches to receive the forgiveness of sins in abundance during the Divine service:

We begin by remembering our baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” sometimes even touching a little water from the font to our foreheads. We’re reminded of the forgiveness brought to us in the Word joined to water.

“You are forgiven.”

We confess our sin to God our Father. He forgives our sin with His own words in the mouth of our pastor.

“You are forgiven.”

Christ’s words wash over us in the reading of the lessons, and we are brought once more to repentance and sweet comfort. Sometimes, both are brought by His same words.

“You are forgiven.”

Christ explains His words and applies them to our lives by means of the sermon.

“You are forgiven.”

And then, there He is!

He “abides with us” (Luke 24:29) and we recognize him “in the breaking of the bread” (v.30).

This is where the woman “who was a sinner” came to find Jesus: the table.

The altar at *your* church.

At this table, Jesus is both guest and host. He comes to each and every one of our churches as a guest, yet He is the Host of the Meal.

“Receive, eat; this is my body. . . Drink. . . this is my blood. . . for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 28:26-28).

“For where there is forgiveness of sins, there also is life and salvation” (Small Catechism).

The food that you and I eat is dead and cooked. And those who eat earthly food grow sick, old, and die. But Christ the Lamb, who once was



dead but now lives (Revelation 1:18, 5:6)., comes to us weekly in the Divine Service through his Words and those Words joined to Water, Body, Blood, Bread, Wine.

“This is the Feast of victory for our God!

*For the Lamb who was slain,
has begun His reign!”* (LSB)

“I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, ESV).

“The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51, NKJV).

Grab ahold of His feet (John 20, Luke 7).

“Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48,50).

And they’re gone.

What a gift.

All we can offer back are sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving: tears of repentance, wiping His feet with our own hair.

When I look around the church that I serve, I see this awesome response of faith.

I see faithful women delicately caring for Christ’s Body and Blood in our altar guild. I see faithful men and women offering themselves as living sacrifices as they serve their Father’s House: patching the roof, pulling weeds, washing windows. I see young men joyfully reading the lessons and asking questions during Bible Study, leaders leading from the Scriptures and Confessions, the faithful visiting the homebound and preparing meals for the sick.

The faithful go to Jesus where He promises to be, and they receive *life* from Him.

Then they go *out there* and share that life with “the world.”

-Rev. Daniel K. Greg

The Ascension of our Lord, 2023.



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Recommended Reading:

-Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service, Arthur Just.

There's no better guide, help, or history of the Divine Service as we practice it today than this book. It's also of normal book length.

If you read this book, you will fall in love with: the Divine Service, helping at your Church, serving Christ and your neighbor.

- Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today, John Kleinig.

A reframing of spirituality for a confusing world. Because we are joined to Christ by baptism, Kleinig reorients spirituality away from our work to simply receiving Christ's gifts through assuring ways which we can grasp onto.

-You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, James K.A. Smith.

This book is a general introduction to those who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with liturgy. It helps to make the connection between our habits which we do already in our daily life and the liturgy of Sunday morning.

Resources:

-Treasury of Daily Prayer, Concordia Publishing House.

This resource is unparalleled for Daily Devotion in the Lutheran Church.

Without needing to "think about it," one can lead his or herself or their family in daily devotions with a continued reading through of one Old Testament and New Testament reading per day. Each day also includes a prayer, short writing from a Church Father, and verse of a hymn that relates to the season of the Church year and readings for the day.

-Lutheran Service Book, *Daily Prayer for Individuals and Families*. (Pages 294-298)

With a bookmark on this section of any LSB hymnal, an individual or family can do one or more of the 4 small Services of the Word depending on the time of day. This allows for adaptability to whatever time the family's together day to day. Each short service can be finished in 5 minutes, or expanded with longer Bible reading, prayers, Catechism reading, etc.

When the family has learned the rhythms, the prayers and liturgy of these short services are actually drawn from the longer “Daily Prayer Offices,” or *services*, which can be found earlier in this hymnal.

It also has suggestions for prayers for each day of the week, to not only mix things up, but also to expand your prayer horizons.

Image Credits:

-“The River from the Temple (Ezekiel 47)” Julia Suh.

-“Heaven on Earth” John Hrehov.

-“The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,” also called “the Ghent Altarpiece” van Eyck.