

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It has been almost two years now since my dad passed away in that accident. I recall at his funeral how comforted I was by the sermon delivered by that LCMS pastor. And it wasn't because the pastor touted all the ways my dad was obedient. Surely that's what we as Christians all want to be and do—we make promises at confirmation. We want to be good Christians, faithful followers of Christ and His word. We want to do what is right. We want to say with the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai: *"All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."* Again, *"All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."* You recall then that their covenant promises were sealed as they were covered with the blood of the covenant, a covenant of the Law, a covenant of doing.

Of course, Israel's failure is well-known. They quickly grumbled at the Lord and His prophet. God sent fiery serpents. Some died. Many repented. Later Korah and a group of men rebelled against the Lord and Moses. They were swallowed up by the earth. Indeed, most of the book of Judges records how Israel fell away from the Lord, were afflicted, and were brought to repentance. Thus, we might wonder, *"How is that 'we will do everything' working out for you, Israel?"* Not so well? Indeed, not! So much so that Peter reminded the fledgling New Testament church at the Jerusalem Council—made up then mostly of Jews, mind you—that this law is a yoke on our necks *"that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear."*

Certainly my dad couldn't. I mean he was a farmer, and a mechanic at an IH-Case implement store. You can imagine that his language was not always polite, genteel, or righteous. Words spewed forth from him at times that were the things that St. Paul tells us as Christians we should put away from our mouths.

My dad was a church-goer, although, I did wonder sometimes whether he did it more to appease Mother, rather than any real zeal for the gospel. When I had decided that I wanted to go to the seminary and pursue the pastoral ministry, my mother was excited. My dad, on the other hand, didn't want me to think I was going to remake him into some super-pious dad. *"Don't try to make me into some Jesus freak,"* he said.

On the other hand, my dad did continue to go to church. He continued to hear the Word read and preached—I don't know if he was listening with his eyes closed like I often do, or if he was zoned out. But especially, only two days before he died, he was at the altar of the Lord, there receiving that *"bread that we break,"* and drinking from that *"cup of blessing that we bless,"* knowing that he would not be saved by that old covenant, obedience to the yoke of the law, but like Moses

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and Joshua, like Samuel and David, like Elijah and the prophets, like Peter and the apostles, he would *“be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.”*

My dad was at the Lord’s altar, believing even if he had a difficult time confessing with his mouth, that this bread was not simple bread, but a communion with the body of Christ (our ESV translates is “participation”), and that what was in this cup was not just wine, but a communion in the blood of Christ. By his actions (because as you already heard, he was not into hypocrisy), he showed that he believed it was not by his doing but by his receiving that he was saved—by another covenant established with blood, the blood of Jesus. He showed that he believed that he could count on Jesus’ words: *“Take. This IS my body.”* Jesus doesn’t say, *“This symbolizes,”* as a church back home in Illinois brazenly said recently. Or *“This represents.”* Or *“This is a picture of my body.”* He doesn’t say any of those things. He says, *“This IS my body,”* and after that, *“This IS my blood of the new testament.”*

Jesus is neither faithless nor deceitful as He gives His church this sacred act to offer to His people—because He loves you, and this sacrament is *“for you.”* He gives it *“for you” “for the forgiveness of your sins.”* He gives it *“for you”* to strengthen your faith in Him. He gives it *“for you”* to build you up in love for your neighbor. He gives it *“for you”* to assure you that you have eternal life, and that you will be raised up on the last day.

This is what occupies us tonight—this Sacrament which Christ gave to His Church to be delivered to the faithful throughout time, delivered to my dad two days before he died (comforting me), delivered to you tonight, doing, I pray, the same. And to be sure, we didn’t hear the command to *“do this in remembrance of me”* in the Gospel from Mark, but we know Jesus’ words well enough. But this command is to His church. Offer this sacrament often, O Church, that My people may receive My promises: the blessing of My body sacrificed once upon the tree, the blessing of My blood, poured out once for all people, all times, all places for the forgiveness of sins, here distributed in, with, and under humble bread and wine.

This truth is depicted so well in some Renaissance art, including, that of the Reformation. Those artists say in images what I try to paint in words, but too often fail. It’s the blessings of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice that He gives us through the Word and Sacraments, especially in the Holy Supper. And so, there is Albrecht Dürer’s one woodcut with Christ on the cross and angels holding chalices, catching the blood dripping out of the wounds in Jesus’ hands and feet and side—the blood of the new testament caught in chalices that it may be drunk by the faithful who gather together, not because they are good, but because they are sinners for whom the Lord died and gave His blood for them to drink. Or there is Van Eyck’s

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famous painting of the Church gathered around the altar, with the slain but living Lamb on the altar, blood pouring from the wound in His side into a chalice—that the Church might drink and live. Or Lucas Cranach the Younger’s famous Altar painting with Christ on the cross as the central image, with baptism in view—the Baptist being there pointing to the Lamb of God; and preaching in view, indeed of Christ crucified—Luther there, with his hand on the Holy Scripture; and the Sacrament in view, the New Testament in Christ’s blood, the artist’s dad there, the blood of Christ pouring from His side onto the head of Cranach the Elder—just like with my dad, the blood of Christ pouring into his mouth two days before his tragic death.

Don’t you agree? These are wonderful depictions of the connection between the cross and the sacraments, and how the Sacraments make contemporary what Christ’s death did so many years ago, and how they give us comfort in times of trouble.

So tonight, for us. We are gathered here not simply to remember this meal, nor even simply to remember Christ’s institution of the meal. We are gathered as Church here tonight to remember Christ’s Passion and to proclaim it by receiving that which Christ gave up THEN AND THERE and has delivered unto YOU NOW: His very body and blood given FOR YOU. Come, eat and drink, not doubting but firmly believing that what you are receiving here has been “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*,” for believing you have what they offer: forgiveness, life and salvation. Come, eat and drink, and be comforted.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.