

## Lectionary 17 A 2021

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

July 25, 2021

John 6:1-21; Ephesians 3:14-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Lutheran confirmation students are usually slowly marinated in the Small Catechism of Martin Luther. The catechism is a teaching tool of questions and answers. For the part about communion, the first question is: *What is the Sacrament of the Altar?* And the answer is given. *It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.* Then follows this question: *Where is this written?* And this answer: *The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and St. Paul write...* For the above average confirmation student— probably about eighth grade, probably has been to a lot of church in their thirteen years— the above average confirmation student raises their hand. “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and PAUL?” “Why not Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?” That’s the confirmation student’s question.

And it’s a very good question. *The body and blood, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself.* Where is that written? Where is that in the Bible? The four gospel writers are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Where does it say that Jesus was from Nazareth? Well: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Where does it say Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Where does it say that Mary Magdalene was a witness to both the crucifixion and the empty tomb? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Where does it say that Jesus established holy communion, his body and his blood, given to us as food and drink? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and... First Corinthians. That is: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul.

So what happened to John? Or more precisely, why doesn’t John have Jesus establishing the Lord’s Supper with *his* body and *his* blood? The answer is in John chapter six. John believes that what Luther calls the Sacrament of the Altar was grounded *not* in the Last Supper. But in the Feeding of the Five Thousand. And in the teachings and promises that Jesus made at the Feeding of the Five Thousand. This is a much bigger deal than most people realize. *We think* we know what communion is. In this congregation, we use the words in the worship book, which are a very slight alteration of the words of Paul the Apostle in First Corinthians. *In the night in which he was betrayed...* *We think* we know what communion is. Martin Luther told us what he thought. And Luther told us where it was written: [which was] Everywhere except John.

When I took high school civics, I had to learn about the Supreme Court of the United States. When the court makes a decision, it is by vote. But they explain their decision in various ways. There is the majority opinion, which is the argument of the winning side. But there are also

dissenting opinions, which come from the minority, who lost the vote on the issue. And there are concurring opinions. Which agree with the decision, but for reasons which may be different than the reasons given in the majority opinion. So: majority opinion, dissenting opinion, concurring opinion.

In the case of the meal that you and I know as holy communion, The majority opinion was produced by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul. And John offers a concurring opinion. Yes, we Christians celebrate the Lord's supper. But not for the reasons you think. We celebrate the Lord's supper for THESE reasons, which John helpfully includes in his gospel as Chapter Six. He starts with the feeding of the five thousand, our reading today. But for the rest of the chapter Jesus talks about what happened, and argues about what happened. And teaches about what it means. And this is John's way of presenting the foundation of holy communion. Not in the last supper, but in the miracle in which the crowds are fed by Jesus. John's concurring opinion. It leads to the same place. But for different reasons. I think that's a useful way to look at the New Testament, and even at the Bible as a whole. It's a community that is committed to various things. But sometimes not everyone is committed. And there are concurring opinions and dissenting opinions about these commitments.

So what does the Church do with John and his concurring opinion? Usually we ignore it. As Martin Luther did in his Small Catechism. In a full communion liturgy, such as we usually do at Dove of Peace, but which many Lutheran churches do *not* do, the fullness of our liturgy accommodates more of the meanings of communion. Notice the plural. *Meanings* of communion. Our broader, ecumenical liturgy here at Dove of Peace encompasses more of the meanings of communion provided by the Bible. So maybe John gets a small nod from the full liturgy. But otherwise John has mostly been ignored.

Then, after the second Vatican council, the churches decided to put John Chapter Six into the lectionary. Which means that in the summer every three years we have five Sundays from the sixth chapter of John. More often than the summer Olympics. Every three years. So all of a sudden, this overlooked concurring opinion of John, fills the pulpits for five weeks. Most preachers think this is way too much. Five weeks about bread. One of my colleagues made up a Greek word— *the penta-hartos*— the five breads— to describe the long, hot, dog days of August and the five weeks of bread. To be clear, if there were just one more week of bread, then this season of bread would be as long, or longer than, Lent.

I am not certain that I am going to preach five sermons this year on John Chapter Six. That may be too much for me. Or too much for you. Or just too much. But I think it's important for you to understand that there is a concurring opinion about the Lord's Supper. A concurring opinion from a very essential book of the New Testament. Churches are divided by their eucharistic theology. In particular, they are divided by the presence of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper. *This is my body, given for you.* How does that work? That's the perplexing question that each church seems to answer slightly differently. John chapter six— a concurring opinion— shifts the focus away from that question. "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven

and gives life to the world.” That’s a verse from next week’s gospel. “*For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*” That’s a different kind of statement than “Do this for the remembrance of me.” “*For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*” It is one thing to think about Jesus as bread and blood for me. It is something else to think about Jesus as bread that gives life to the world. Both must be true. But the concurring opinion gives us a fresh chance to be impressed by this meal and what it means. Beyond the Small Catechism. As good as that may be.

In our second reading today, Paul continues his advice to the Ephesians about the fullness and the breadth of life in Christ. *To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* There is always more to know about Christ’s love, the love that surpasses knowledge. In communion, where we meet Christ and know him, there is always more than we think. Amen.