

## Our Communion is Our Banner

The second last sentence in Walther's Thesis VII on communion fellowship is "Our Communion is our banner." Have you ever noticed that the banners we put up tend to be statements of the Law? Take the late LCMS President Al Barry's five points. They were made into banners to be placed in churches. Here was what hung before the people's eyes: "Be in the Word," "Remain Faithful," "Care for one another," "Live at peace," "Tell the Good News." Yes, that's what I need kept in front of me in the Divine Service; the Law I already don't keep. How different was the banner of the first president of the LCMS. "Our Communion is our banner." You can tell a lot about a people by what they keep before their eyes.

Communion is a proclamation of what the Lord did. Paul tells us this. "As often as you eat this Bread and drink the Cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." The banner of Communion proclaims that our Lord gave His Body and shed His Blood to give us the Promised Land. As the first Passover celebrated the Lord delivering His people from the slavery of Egypt by means of the blood of a lamb which they then ate for food, so the last Passover *introduced* the first Lord's Supper which celebrates the Lord delivering His people from the slavery of sin by means of the Blood of the Lamb of God which they eat for Food.

The banner of Communion proclaims to one and all that we as a people have no forgiveness, no life, no salvation, no Promised Land apart from the Body and Blood of Jesus. On our own we only have sin, death, hell, and desert. That's what we deserve. My sins of just today and my sinfulness that I was born with are enough to keep me out of earthly good let alone a Promised Land. And that was just fine with me. I wasn't just a sinner dead in my sins; I was blind to my real blight and an enemy of the only God who could deliver me. But that wasn't fine with God. O no, He sent His only Son into my Flesh and Blood to be and do what I could never, and to suffer what I deserve.

Down, down, down into a virgin's womb came God the Son. Out, out, out He went into the world being the perfect Child I was not and doing all things right that I did wrong. And though He's did things perfectly He suffered miserably. I just *think* I'm being repaid for my sins. Jesus was. He was a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief; to my cross He went; to my judgment He went; to my damnation He went. Having done all things well, He suffered perfectly, completely, not only for my sins and your sins but the sins of the world. He made peace between God and mankind through His Body and Blood. Now this Body and Blood flap in the wind above our churches proclaiming what our Lord did to give us His Promised Land.

Communion also proclaims that ours is not an absent Lord. Our Communion is not a symbol, not a representation, not a reminder of Jesus' Body and Blood. It *is* His Body and Blood. The French translation of the Words of Institution conveys this. Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of Me;" 'remembrance' is a special Greek word. The French Bible translates that phrase: *me rappeler avous*. Do this "to bring Me back to you."

Our Communion is a sign, a banner that our Lord and Savior still comes among us today. That's why we cry out before the Words of Institution what the crowd did on Palm Sunday, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." That's why we sing out after they're spoken to the Christ now present on our altars, "Have mercy upon us...grant us Thy peace." That's why we say after communing what Simeon said as he held Baby Jesus in his arms, "Mine eyes have *seen* Thy salvation."

Our Communion is a banner proclaiming what Chesterton has a little girl saying to an atheist who says there is no God. "'But there is,' said Madeline quite quietly, 'Why, I touched His Body only this morning'" (*The Bell and the Cross*, 100). Think that's over the top? Making our Banner say too much? Here the sainted Dr. Marquart then, "The apostolic church understood the deep connection between the Sacrament and the Resurrection, and saw in the Supper of His Body and Blood a continuation of His resurrection appearances..." (*Church Growth*, 91).

Our Communion is our banner; it proclaims that we worship a tangibly present God. However, our banner also proclaims something about us. By gathering about the Body and Blood Jesus gave and shed for sinners we proclaim ourselves to be sinners.

In the ancient Greek liturgies the celebrant invited the people to commune with, "The holy things for the holy people." Neither they nor we respond, "We are holy; here we come." But, "One is holy; one is Lord, Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father" (Sasse, *This is My Body*, 320). As Walther said in 1856, We "begin the altar service bowing with a silent sigh to God" (in Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 23). The banner flapping over our heads doesn't proclaim we're better than anyone else but that we know we need forgiveness more than anyone else. With St. Ambrose we say, "If every time the blood is poured out it is poured out for the remission of sins, I ought to receive it always... Because I constantly sin, I constantly need to have the remedy" (in Chemnitz, *Examination II*, 354).

Our Communion is our banner, and it proclaims not only that sinners are gathered here but dead men are. Luther lived and died in the Sacrament. He was fond of calling it the Medicine of Immortality. He got this from St. Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians which calls Communion, "The medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields life" (20). Luther's life was not in his beating heart, his breathing lungs, his thinking mind, but in the Body and the Blood. He not only lived in it; he died in it. He said that we Christians are to "go freely and happily to the Sacrament and die [to ourselves] in it" (in Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 168).

By having Communion as our banner we are proclaiming what Augustine did to a woman who knew him in his debauched Manichean days: "Augustine doesn't live here anymore." Ah now we're on to something, aren't we? If we don't live under this banner, if our Lord, Savior, and God does, then who has the say here? By whose Words do we go by? Who has the say so in this Land of Promise? Who has the final Word in this House? This is from the *Lutheran Church Visitor*, January 28, 1915, "It may be asked what right we have to [limit who communes]. People say it is the Lord's Table, and so it is. For the very reason that it is the *Lord's Table* we have absolutely no right to do as we please with it. Since it is His and *not ours*, we must stay within the limitations which He Himself has placed around it" (*Concordia Journal*, July 1989, 253).

I told you that "Our Communion is our banner," is Walther's second last statement in Thesis VII. His last is, "He who in his heart does not stand with us Lutherans should also not stand under this banner, and he who does this nevertheless we declare to be a traitor." Friends, the world would not tolerate a Nebraska football player running out on to the field and standing with the UT football team. Pundits would not tolerate Mitt Romney entering a primary as a democrat, yet Christians are not only suppose to tolerate but welcome anyone who wants to commune with them. And confessional Lutherans are supposed to welcome all Lutherans.

This is what *Lutheranism 101*, a 2010 book published by CPH, says. "We don't want to mislead anyone with our 'advertisement' of faith [You could read 'banner' here.], nor do we want a church to misrepresent what they advertise. This is why Lutherans commune at Lutheran churches: so that together we tell the world what God taught us" (161-62). God has taught the ELCA that: a) abortion is a choice; b) homosexuals may be pastors; c) you can be in communion with church bodies that have never confessed the Real Presence. And God has taught many LCMS churches what *Lutheranism 101* implies: you can, indeed you are, in communion with all other Lutherans.

I ask you: is that any way for forgiven sinners to act? Should I who've been freed from slavery to sin return to the sins of others? Should I who've been rescued from Egypt join with those who don't want to leave? Should I profane the Word of the Lord who *took* all my sins, by partaking in the sins of others? I ask you: can we dead men, alive not to ourselves, our words, thoughts, or opinions but only to Christ's, unfurl His Banner over those who publicly and pointedly believe, teach, and confess what the Lutheran Church has not only *never* taught but believed, taught and confessed against? Don't get me wrong; *I* could do that; *I* could think it meet, right, and salutary, but *I* don't live under the banner of Communion only Jesus does.

But what about outreach, what about mission, what about growing? In 1868 years after he began training and sending missionaries to America Wilhelm Loehe said, "All our actions, no matter how little or great, has not had, and still does not have, any other intention than to *honor the creative Words of our Most Holy Consecrator in the Sacrament of the Altar*" (in "Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in the Light of Church History," Martin Wittenberg, *Logia*, I,1, 47).

Every Communion service I celebrate, every person I commune, and every person I *don't* commune is done to honor the Person and Work of My Savior present in His Sacrament to bless and grow His Church as He sees fit. Our Communion is our banner. Any banner gathers some and repels others, so that aspect of a banner shouldn't surprise us. However, only one Banner forgives sinners, enlivens dead men, and saves damned ones, and that's the Holy Communion instituted by Jesus our Lord and celebrated according to His institution. That's the banner we keep before our eyes. Amen.

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