

Sacraments & Lutherans  
(World Communion Sunday, 2Oct16)  
Habakkuk1:1-4,2:1-4; 2Timothy1:1-14

In the MCC Vision-Tending team that is focused on this partnership, in worship committees, and other conversations have been requests about better understanding each other. We're not smushing together denominations, but sharing while also maintaining our individual unique identities and beliefs. Of course, at MCC that's still not just two categories of beliefs but uniquely proliferates to each of us gathered now. Still, this World Communion Sunday, celebrating what it means to be together and partaking in sacraments seemed like an appropriate time to reflect on similarities and differences.

So this is a fast reflection on the general Lutheran sense of sacraments. Clearly that can't hit all the questions, but will at least try to establish a core. I want to jump in with the song the Chimes just played for us: *Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so*. That's a perfect place to begin, making us ask: do you know Jesus loves you because of the Bible? The standard tale claims somebody hanging by a thread could open that well-stashed Gideon copy in their hotel's drawer. But they most likely wouldn't open to a passage that told them Jesus loved them. They may hit a part with rules they broke or a violent historical account. Even if they found exactly the right verse, while at rock bottom they likely wouldn't believe that that message of love could be for them. That Bible, they'd figure, must've been written for somebody else.

Preaching is intended to resolve that gap, declaring to each other the message—or the Word from God—that Jesus loves you. Not that Jesus loved a type of person or somebody back when the Bible was written. Or that Jesus loves generically. The message of a sermon, or when

we proclaim the gospel to each other, is that Jesus loves you. Yes, you.

Still, that's not foolproof. You may remain unable to hear my voice as a word from God applying to you. Given that I don't know what you've done, can I claim that God could love you? Or you may have had a rotten week which sure didn't exhibit God's love, so it may still feel like the message is for someone else. Plus, I stand up here, and some of you sit way in the back.

Which brings us to sacraments, to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as Jesus trying to ensure the promise is delivered directly to you. In baptism, as the water hit Sawyer's and Auden's heads, it came with God's declaration, "You are my son, my daughter, I love you. I will always love you, no matter what." That promise was delivered with the splash of water so that Auden and Sawyer may trust it was exactly for them and nobody else in that moment.

And as you take a nibble of bread and sip of wine, Jesus is promising that he is there for you, with the fullness of his gracious, forgiving, loving presence, offering his life and all he has. For you. No matter what you've done, no matter how you feel about it, this is for you.

Saying this is Jesus' body and blood almost certainly raises questions. Those of you with Catholic backgrounds know transubstantiation. Well, Lutherans don't go in for that hocus pocus.\* Instead, we might begin to ask: where is God? Quickly we'd respond that God is everywhere. That means God is in my shoe and out in the chicken coop and God is in the bread, because God is ubiquitous.

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\*As delivered, I'm realizing this was poor word choice. Behind it, "hocus pocus" was a term from those who didn't understand the Latin "*hoc corpus meum est*—this is my body," and thought the priest had powers in magical incantations to transform the bread to something else. But that distinction got lost in what seemed like making light of disparaging others' beliefs. I apologize.

But the importance is in knowing where to look for God. We tend to look at death or tragedies, at refugees of war or a frustrating political mess and wonder where God could possibly be. That's the situation we'll hear in Habakkuk. But it's vital not to be stuck with the guessing games of where God might be or what God might be up to. Instead here is the confidence in water of God promising love. God is in a piece of bread to offer forgiveness and life. So even when it's miserable and you'd wonder if God forgot about you or maybe you're even being punished, you can rather remember your baptism, receive and taste again the assurance of Jesus with you.

Though it's surprising that God would use packaged bread from the co-op and Wollersheim wine and plain ol' unholy tap water, you may even more doubt another of God's means and ends, meaning me and you. First, what makes me a pastor? I'm a scrawny young goofball, and certainly no better than you are. But this role isn't about being holier or having magical mojo. Really, anybody can say these words, just as whenever you're told God loves you. I'm just here for reliability, hopefully so you can count on me (and the same for Sonja). I'm paid to hang around this place so when you need to be told God loves you, you can rely on me to say it.

And I'm supposed to do that for you with God's utter abandon, with the total unconditional sense, not based on how good you've been or likeable you seem or anything like that. God is so reckless and so insistent on this love that it's not based on earning it at all, as 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy says (though indirectly, as I'm having to apply that message for you now). For this constant support and guide and resource, God chooses even babies. God makes this promise before we can prove how we'll turn out in life at all.

With that was an interesting Confirmation discussion this past week. One student said she would've preferred a choice about being baptized. But do we ever have a choice about being loved? We can run or reject or rebel, but we can't stop being loved—in good instances from people we know, but always from God. God chooses love before all and through all.

Alongside that, it strikes me as a little silly that we have elected that teenage as the time for Affirmation of Baptism. That age in life is about exploring all the edges and possibilities, pushing boundaries and testing authorities. Most teenagers would be hard-pressed to claim the love of family, of which they've had good evidence, so why ask them to affirm a love from God that requires much more uncertain trust?

Still, that exhibits the persistence of this promise. Jesus is still for you, still striving after love, still offering life, continuously working for and through you, whether you think you understand it or not, can explain it or not, whether you'd choose it, ready or not.

And that's some of the important Lutheran word for a World Communion Sunday, that this isn't limited by or dependent on how well we're getting along or how well-qualified anybody thinks we are. This is the presence of the Holy Spirit more constantly than we can imagine and can only begin to trust. This is God's way of using the mundane as sacred, the unexpected blessing, the earthy for godly purposes, the ordinary as miraculous, in bread, wine and water, from common folks, in drawing a diverse group of us together, binding us across the world, throughout the generations as family, and motivating us to share this life with all.