

Responses to ThTh 148: "Easter without Eucharist. Feast or Fast?"

Colleagues,

The ThTh posting just before Easter (148) reported the battle waged by one of you subscribers just to get the eucharist celebrated in 2 of the 4 Easter services at a big ELCA congregation in the upper midwest. No surprise, it elicited responses. Here are some of them. Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

RESPONSES

1. An ELCA pastor in Florida Thanks for sharing the "fight" for the Eucharist, and thanks to that layman for not giving up. I applaud him for his effort. Maybe someday this pastor will wake up to the fact that the "Sole" reason for gathering is the meal.
2. A California deaconess Thanks for that post, Ed. Living out here in the wilds of California, where liturgy and Luther are being dispensed with as part of the territory. It has provided me with the hope that as a liturgical purist and sacramental Lutheran, I am not all alone in the ELCA. He lives!
3. A globe-trotting woman in the world of high-tech business I can not even begin to tell you how much I can relate to

your message here! I have been searching for a church in Phoenix since I moved here that has Gospel-based theology, regular communion (I'd actually settle for every other week) and decent music (whole other question as to why Lutherans feel they can't "enjoy" church). It's darn near impossible. I can understand the desire to grow the church – after all, that is the great commission. But I really don't think it has to be at the sacrifice of truth, or the over-simplification of the message.

I actually sat through a 45-minute sermon last week waiting for the exciting revelation that was sure to come at the end. Of course, it all boiled down to "Jesus loves you." Granted, it's a good point :-), but so much more was there that was completely skipped because the preacher seemed to be afraid to get anyone thinking! I get more out of your messages every week than most sermons here – and for that I am forever grateful! Have a Blessed Easter!

4. A retired seminary prof Just read Thursday Theology. That has to be a Minnesota congregation. [Ed: it was not.] I see and hear that kind of argument all the time up here. A lot of the people are from the Haugean tradition. At our congregation we are well fed with both Word AND Sacrament. Thanks be to God. Hope you both feast well after the Lenten Fast.

5. St. Louis layman, addicted to serious theology All I can say is UNBELIEVABLE!!!!

We just returned from our Maundy Thursday service where HC was certainly focus and climax of the worship. We had two youth take their First Communion tonight and following the Post-Communion Prayer, we stripped the altar for Good Friday worship. Thanks be to God that we have a reason to replace the vessels and paraments on Easter morning so that we can celebrate the Eucharist once again in joy and

thanksgiving.

6. Another St. Louis layman, also addicted to serious theology. That was quite a story. Flyin' the Church at half-mass, my third pastor would say.

I can't imagine myself not doing as your friend had done, though I might have been a little more blunt with the pastor. That DOES, after all, give meaning to the term "doctrine of the call." Had the pastor forgotten that Hauge was a layman? I fail to see how the historical incidence of a famous lay preacher preaching is any defense of the regularly called doing all that he (in this case) was called to do. He'd clearly drawn a line in the sand though, identifying himself with "word" as over against "sacrament"—he obviously needed the help your friend offered.

And wasn't that a hoot? – "if the sheep tell the shepherds where to lead, pretty soon they'll take their hands off and then where'll you be?"??? If the shepherds need telling where to lead (and some apparently do), what are they doing there in the first place!? They'd better move over and the sooner the better. So glad he thought preaching was a good idea, as your friend rightly said. Thinks a little more highly of himself than he ought to think, I'd say.

I'm used to not having Communion on Easter though (not that I like it at all) the argument is that there will be too many visitors and since (LCMS, mind you) we can't commune them all we'd just better not commune the members either. I never bought that one myself, nor would I have made it if I were the Pastor, but, oh well, they tell me "in the old days" they only communed quarterly, and I read that the "Father Hayer" who rode circuit for the plains settlers refused to commune people even THAT often. So

maybe progress is being made.

7. A retired ELCA pastor in California
Dear Ed,
My response to your ThTh 148 is a poem I wrote a couple of years ago, to help teach a congregation to celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday.

“DO THIS FOR MY REMEMBRANCE” (1 Cor. 11:26)

- 1. What if His Majesty, our Sovereign Lord,
Should us an opportunity afford
To meet Him Sunday after Sunday here,
And He would come and actually appear?*
- 2. And would we stir ourselves to join the crowd?
And would we greet our Lord with voices loud?
And would we forward strive to feel His touch?
Or think a weekly visit was too much?*
- 3. And yet He comes to us in wine and bread.
He comes in every worship, as He said.
He offers us Himself at every mass—
And shall we simply say, “We’ll let it pass?”*
- 4. We would not, pouting, wish to make complaint:
“Long worship takes the patience of a saint.”
Receive the invitation of the Lord!
Nor miss the blessings of this festive board!*

8. An Anglican priest in Canada
Surrexit Christus, Alleluia!
Hope you will forgive a response from an outsider. (Must admit that on this point it is easier to be a Lutheran in an Anglican Church than in a Lutheran one! That is not true on some other points, so don’t think me too smug.)

Even while residing on the other side of the Elbe, such restrictions on the times of celebrations of the Sacrament puzzled me. The Luth. Confessions (the envy of High Church

Anglicans on this point) make it plain that the Mass has not been abolished but is celebrated every Sunday and Holy Day with even greater reverence than at the Italian mission down the street, etc., and they teach a balance of Word and Sacrament. And from the feedback coming through these very pages, a lot of the proclamation of the Word is, well, somewhat lacking. At least the Sacrament doesn't depend on the eloquence (or sinless-ness!) of its administrator for its efficacy!

Why is there this concern about the Communion on Easter—or any other day? I don't understand—what am I missing? In doing my 'Cross-ings' analysis of the question, the diagnosis centres on fear—fear of the 'church' (read institution) losing its authority in pastoral matters, etc., coming down to fear that God, present in the Sacrament isn't able to take care of Himself if placed into the hands of the careless, heedless, morally suspect, 'unworthy.' Isn't that what He did in the Incarnation (prognosis)? And surely the Easter feast would remind us that such hands do not prevail. Jesus wins, so there is no reason for fear.

To approach from a different tack, faith apprehends the benefits given in the Sacrament—and, we are reminded it only need be as small as a grain of mustard seed. Those presenting themselves at the altar rail are expecting something—they may not understand what (do any of us at that point?)—but they expect it is good. As pastors, we cannot look into another's heart, and at the altar rail we must, a la 9th Commandment [Ed: that's according to Anglican numbering. It's the 8th in Luther's catechisms.], put the best construction on what our neighbour does. Who knows what motives pushed Zacchaeus to climb that sycamore tree, but look at what he got—salvation to his house.

Those who are afraid they might be giving what is Holy to dogs might consider a conversation with the Syro-Phoenician woman. To say that faith plus filling out a card, etc. is necessary to apprehend the benefits of the Sacrament seems to me to contradict the principle of Justification by Faith, and we know where that goes. 'Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it' says the Lord in the Psalms. Fill it indeed!

Mind you, I am not saying be prodigal in the administration of the Sacrament. In our bulletin we simply say, those who are not communicants are welcome to come to the rail for a blessing, simply folding their hands as a signal to the priest. Implicit is that those who are communicants know who they are. If there is someone I do not know, afterwards I find out, so if faith is simply the spark of the curious, I might seek to place it where the wind of the Spirit might fan it into a flame.

There is a remarkable book by S. Endo, a Japanese author, titled SILENCE. It is about a 16th century Portuguese missionary to Japan during the persecutions of Christians. Unless he places his foot on the icon of Christ, his fellow Christian prisoners will continue to be tortured. He struggles with his triumphalistic attitude, but ultimately comes to the shocking conclusion that this is what Jesus would want him to do, that He became incarnate for this purpose, to be 'trampled.'

We confess through the Cross the powers of sin, death, hell have been vanquished. For some it might mean the death of pride as they look into the face of Him whom they have stepped on, or taken carelessly into their hands, their mouths, and see the infinite love there for them and be moved to love Him in return.

If that is Schwaermerei, so be it. But even many of the 17th century Leipziger Lutheran Orthodoxen were mystics...

9. A church musician in the Carolinas I especially enjoyed reading this week's Thursday Theology. How distraught that man must have been to have such a situation to react to. He certainly handled it well. I've heard and read the opinion that congregations that don't have "contemporary worship" are not growing. I hope the folks in our church never hear the one about "sacramental" churches aren't growing.
Oh, dear!
10. An ELCA Pastor in Florida (Says he's "Seminex '75") Thanks for the piece about the 'Feastless Feast.' It is really distressing that there are pastors out there, who should know better, that are promoting less instead of more Eucharist. I am deep down a pretty low church and conservative kind of person, but theologically, a few years ago, along with my female pastor partner, I could not continue having Sunday worship without offering the Eucharist. And for those folks who had trouble with weekly communion I just said, I know it's not a part of everybody's tradition, but do you have a theological reason why we shouldn't celebrate this weekly? I have yet to have a reason given, even from the staunchest opponents, who by the way have really come around and accepted this, and participate in fact. The piece reminds me of an old English District retired pastor who assisted me years ago before he died, and who said he didn't offer communion on Easter, mostly for the same reasons the interim in the story didn't. All I can say is 'Lord have mercy' and 'Please pass the bread and wine!'
11. A recently retired District President (LC-MS) My wife & I just returned from 19 days (April 1-19) in Bishkek,

Kyrgyzstan (my retirement gift from the District congregations... every DP should go there... every ELCA Bishop too... and that Interim Head Pastor too...) And while I have 125 e-messages waiting for me, I read with great interest your writer's "conversations" with his Interim Pastor... and HE is correct, right on! ... and I urge him to keep on saying what he said and did!

The growth of the Church, the people of God, and the regular, faithful, receiving of the blessings of Christ in the Holy Supper are NOT incompatible. It's the way our Lord designed his body to grow... in every way! The "contemporary service" Lutheran churches I fill in at around here (there are not many of 'em in the LCMS, but there are some!) ALL celebrate Holy Communion regularly, weekly!...and the newest Lutheran church in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan celebrates Holy Communion EVERY Sunday.

I was there on the Sunday, April 1st, when they announced the receiving of their "charter" from the Kyrgyz gov't ... and it was the ONLY Lutheran service I ever attended where, in honor of the occasion (a VERY rare one in that economically collapsed, poverty-ridden, unemployed and struggling nation) the president of the congregation purchased CHAMPAGNE so that everyone would raise a toast of "thanksgiving to God" for the privilege of organizing a small, but growing congregation!

The real "toast" was the eucharist of our Lord's Body and Blood ... but the other seemed most appropriate too. Anyhow, keep challenging the nay-sayers! ... and try to get them to read the Gospels and the Book of Acts more frequently! Those first followers of the Risen Lord became more than Church members... they became Disciples by use of the "means of Grace!" IT CAN HAPPEN IN 2001 AGAIN... as we make use of the same "means of Grace" ... Gospel Word AND sacrament!