

Canadian Sitcom *Kim's Convenience* follows the lives of a Korean-Canadian family who owns a convenience store in Toronto. In one episode, Mr. Kim sees a Japanese manufactured car parked illegally in front of their store, and he insists that his daughter, Janet, call the police to get it towed. When the daughter hesitates, he justifies himself saying we need to tow the car because Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Upon further inspection, he sees it's a Korean manufactured car, and tells Janet to hang up the phone.

When I tell you tonight that part of the reason why we take a strong stand on our practice of the Lord's Supper is because of lessons learned from the Prussian Union of Churches in 1817, you might think this is as irrational as Mr. Kim towing an illegally parked car simply because the Japanese annexed Korea in 1910. What's the big deal? Why be stuck in the past. That's over 200 years ago! Why do we get so weird about the Lord's Supper?

1817 is simply one data point, but this goes back not 200 years, but 2,000 years. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod takes a strong stand on the teaching of the Lord's Supper precisely because we wish to be faithful to the meal that Jesus instituted in the upper room that we read all about just earlier in the service. **BECAUSE CHRIST COMES TO US IN COMMUNION, THE CHURCH FIGHTS FOR THE SUPPER OF THE LAMB.**

I. The Church fights for the supper of the lamb. As we wrap up the sermon series fighting for, I will remind us of the theme verse for the last half of our series. Revelation 19:9 “**Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.**” As we mess with the supper that the Lamb of God started on Maundy Thursday, we run the risk of misunderstanding and even missing out on the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

This fight has gone on since the beginning of the Church. Even in the Bible, Paul corrects abuses at the church in Corinth wherein the Corinthians were treating the Lord's Supper only as a common meal for people to sit with their friends and to get drunk. Later in history, sects would substitute water instead of wine. Uninformed common people would confiscate consecrated communion wafers and use them as talismans to ward off evil. Just to name a few examples.

Luther fought against abuses of the Lord's Supper taught in his day such that simply by saying the right words, the act of the Lord's Supper was appeasing God. Also, the church at the time taught falsely that the bread and the wine ceased to be present in the meal and instead completely transformed into body and blood. On the other hand, denominations appeared that denied that anything special happened to the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and it was simply a symbolic act. Luther defended against such a claim by taking Christ's Words at face value. To quote our Gospel reading, “**And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my**

body.”... And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

Fast forward three hundred years, by the 1800s, the Church in Germany also had its share of struggles. Unbelief was rampant in the churches as even pastors started doubting key doctrines such as miracles and the resurrection. Well-meaning Christians in that atmosphere then sought to revitalize the church by making religion something internal focusing on you, Jesus, and the Bible only.

It was in this landscape that the government struck at this compromised Church. King Frederick William III sought to unify the non-Catholic churches. A noble wish, but he did so without the church leaders resolving the underlying disagreements. The result was that on the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, he created the Prussian Union of Churches which combined the Lutheran Church with the Reformed Church.

As time went on, he more forcefully implemented the changes. Because the Lutheran and Reformed couldn't agree whether Jesus was truly present in the bread and wine of communion, instead of the pastors saying, “the body of Christ” as they handed out the bread, he had the pastors say the noncommittal phrase, “Jesus said, “this is my body.” They had Lutheran pastors ceremonially break the bread during the service which was the Reformed way of saying that this was simply a symbol.

A group of Lutherans saw through this ruse, and they saw the church compromising their beliefs that many of their forefathers, Luther included, fought to keep. This group of Lutherans was given the name the “Old Lutherans.” And many of them protested these changes by leaving Germany altogether. Some sailed to South Australia, others sailed to New York State, and still others sailed to Missouri. The heritage of our denomination comes from those immigrants who left Saxony to go to America. Our sermon series that started in Dresden, also ends in Dresden as many of our spiritual forefathers came from Dresden and the region surrounding it.

The situation in America was certainly a wild west. In an ancestor publication to the Lutheran Witness, simply called *Der Luteraner*, or the Lutheran, an 1848 article edited by C.F.W. Walther bemoans the pastors in America who would open communion to everyone just to please people and draw a crowd.

With that backdrop, we will briefly visit two points as we close out our Maundy Thursday sermon. First, II. Christ comes to us in communion. Paul writes, **“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”** Christ is truly present in this meal. In that article edited by C.F.W. Walther, we read, “Whoever partakes of the Holy Supper without the correct faith and thus unworthily will not only not receive the grace which lies in it but will also

find in it instead of grace, wrath; instead of life, death; instead of blessing, curse” (Pastoral Theology, page 173). Likewise, in the Bible Paul warns us against partaking of the body and blood in an unworthy manner.

Thus, the controversy about the Lord’s Supper in 1817 was not a petty squabble, but it was a pastoral care issue of preparing all to receive Christ worthily. When we continue this practice of closed communion, we do it out of love, that your faith may be strengthened by this meal. We do it because Christ is truly present in this meal to keep you in the true faith, nourish you spiritually in the days ahead, and comfort you with His continued promises of forgiveness.

Second, III. We share with one another in communion. Paul continues, **“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”** Likewise, Paul writes, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”** The Lord’s Supper is a confession of shared faith.

The article in *der Luteraner* contrasts the nature of preaching to the nature of the Holy Supper. One can listen to a sermon to learn what a church body teaches without approving of the church body. In other words, it’s certainly no sin to go to your spouse’s Roman Catholic church on occasion or to go to your nephew’s Baptist church. However, “By contrast, Holy Communion is an act of confession; if one communes in a different church, one actually joins it, acts as a witness for its teaching, and declares its members to be one’s brothers and sisters in the faith.”

This is an unpopular teaching today just as it was in America in the 1800s as it was in Germany in 1817. Can’t we all just get along? Jesus desires unity, to be certain, but unity doesn’t happen by a king forcing unification of churches at the threat of imprisonment. It doesn’t happen by smiling and turning a blind eye to significant theological differences. Unity happens as we open Scripture together, and discuss what it means, and agree upon the teachings of Scripture.

Yes, there are things we can do together with different Christians. We can stand alongside Catholics in a demonstration to stand up for the lives of the unborn. We can volunteer among mainline Protestants such as United Methodists at a soup kitchen. However, Jesus established the Lord’s Supper as the pinnacle of unity as we commune not only with God, but we commune with one another.

If you have been admitted to a LCMS Altar previously, as you come up for communion tonight, you can not only look heavenward as you commune with God, but you can look around and see the fellow Christians who Jesus has united here in the place to act as the body of Christ.

On a day like today, we thank Jesus for the faithful lives of Lutherans such as Walther who went against the grain in taking a stand for what Jesus instituted on this night so many years ago. May we also have the boldness to confess this faithfully so we may safeguard the inheritance Jesus has given to His Church.