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In Remembrance of Me, n.d.

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"IN REMEMBERANCE OF ME..."

It is Sunday morning in a thousand Lutheran churches throughout the land. The sermon has ended. The congregation rises for the Offertory. Once more the ancient, beautiful words rise through the church to the altar: "Create in me a clean heart...Renew a right spirit within me...Cast me not away from Thy presence...Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation..." The last sentence is particularly significant. In a day when our Christian faith is so often identified with darkness and gloom it is good for us to remember every Sunday that our faith is a great, joyous and happy thing. The joy of Thy salvation! This is the secret of the Christian life. This is the great heart of the truly Christian relationship to God and to man.

The pastor descends from the pulpit and announces the hymn preceding the celebration of Holy Communion. In many churches it undoubtedly is the magnificent, joyful chorale:

"Soul, adorn thyself with gladness,
Leave behind all gloom and sadness;
Come into the daylight's splendor,
There with joy thy praises render
Unto Him whose grace unbounded
Hath this wondrous Supper founded.
High o'er all the heav'ns He reigneth,
Yet to dwell with thee He deigneth."

Again there is the same singing, soaring note of joy and gladness. A great moment in the Christian life is approaching. A moment of deep happiness and lasting joy!

The pastor moves to the altar and reverently prepares the vessels for the Lord's Supper. He turns to the congregation and the age-old liturgy begins: "The Lord be with you; And with thy spirit." As at the very beginning of the entire service, the pastor and people once more bespeak for each other the full and abiding presence of the living God. There is a brief preface or foreword which identifies the season of the church year in which this particular service is being conducted. Immediately after that there is again the note of grateful joy: "With angels and archangels and
all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name," the Lord's Prayer and then the solemn words of institution, the consecration of the bread and wine with the searching words "In remembrance of Me."

These words indicate clearly the first purpose of the Supper instituted by our Lord on the night before His death. In remembrance of Me! Through the silence of the long centuries comes the haunting, pleading voice "This do in remembrance of Me."
At this point the Lutheran Christian at the Communion service preparing for the Lord's Supper must be very sure of the meaning of these words. Perhaps we can remember the beautiful explanation of Martin Luther in our Small Catechism. "What ought we to do when we eat His body and drink His blood and thus receive the pledge?"
Answer: "We ought to proclaim His death and the shedding of His blood as He taught us: This do as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me."

"Why ought we to remember and proclaim His death?"

"That we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins but Christ through God and man and that we may learn to look with terror at our sins and to regard them as great indeed and to find joy and comfort in Him alone, and thus be saved through such faith."

This is the very center of the Christian faith. It draws us up the hill of Calvary and into the shadow of the Cross. We can never forget that the source of all power and joy in the Christian life lies at the foot of the Cross. Who comes to us in the Lord's Supper? The Christ of the Cross, the Lamb of the eternal sacrifice, the sin-burdened fashioner of Atonement. Once more we see the silences of eternity, the counsels of the Holy Trinity, the crying of prophets, the long nights of waiting, the voice of a Child in a manger, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, all point to the center of the world's history and the heart of the world's hope—the Cross of Jesus Christ. Here the conflict of sin and grace comes to a burning focus. Here we see the full generosity of God and the full shame of man. This is what He meant when He said: "In remembrance of Me."
As always in the shadow of the Cross life and history and time become clear and sharp. Here, as Luther indicates, we see two things: first, the terror of sin; and, secondly, the joy of salvation. Among the many tragically wrong things in the modern world none is more saddening than our frequent misunderstanding of the word "sin". We have forgotten that our Lutheran doctrine of the justification by faith always presupposes a deep, God-given consciousness of sin. This was the way of St. Paul, St. Augustine and Martin Luther. All of them felt the terror of sin like the slash of a whip. They felt sin in the one way in which the modern mind does not feel it, as the real reason for our broken world.

It is only at the foot of the Cross and in the God-given remembrance of our Savior that we realize that sin is always the breaking down of fellowship. The ruin is more complete the higher we go. Every reference to sin in Holy Writ always pictures it as wandering, loneliness, going away, going astray, separation. It is always the same tolling theme. We had a home once and we lost it. We had a fellowship and we broke it. We had a love and we forgot it.

As we confess our sins and receive the absolution, this must be uppermost in our minds. We must realize how great our distance from God has been and how deeply and bitterly we need our Savior's body and blood for the assurance of release from the terror and the horror of sin.

The words of institution have been spoken, the Agnus Dei has been sung, and the communion begins. Silently and reverently the worshippers approach the altar. Just what is happening there now? Again there is no better answer than the simple, clear words of Martin Luther's Small Catechism. "You believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?"

"Yes, I believe it."

"What induces you to believe this?"

"The Word of Christ: 'Take, eat, this is My body; drink ye all of it, this is My blood.'"

In God's own mysterious way the simple bread and wine become truly the body and
blood of the Savior of the world. In, with and under these signs there is the real presence of the God-man Jesus Christ.

It is this real presence of our Savior in the Sacrament which gives it its tremendous spiritual power. Through the bread and wine He comes to us with the great and absolute assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. In the Lord's Supper we are face to face with the amazing miracle of God's love, the restoration of fellowship, the return to the Father's house. In our Savior our brokenness is healed and our union with God and man is restored. The great separation now, so long and so bitter, has been ended by our reunion with God through the work of Jesus Christ. The bonds of sin are loosed. We have again the freedoms beneath and beyond all human freedoms—the freedom from fear of sin, the freedom from want of God, the freedom of worship of God, the freedom of speech to God. All this comes to us in the Word and Sacraments by the full, free grace of God.

It is necessary always to remember that the forgiveness of our sins, the message of the Christian gospel, is the story of an accomplished fact. We are face to face in the Sacrament with a finished redemption. One of the most curious things in church history is the desire of men to return to the pagansim of the law. All about us we see the effort to make Christianity a quest instead of an achievement. Over against that our Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper makes it perfectly clear for all time that the work of the forgiveness of our sins is complete by any and every standard of measurement, human or divine. In the Word and in the Sacrament He assures that He has restored the divine balance between justice and mercy. Now and forever mercy rules in His church.

This, then, is the reason for the joy of our salvation. In the Sacrament we are again united with the suffering Christ, the risen Christ, the conquering Christ of the past. In the Sacrament we are united with the waiting and mediating Christ of the present and the future. In remembrance of Him we remember, too, that He is now in the Majestic stillness of eternity, waiting for history to accomplish His last
purposes. Through the centuries He sends the Comforter, perpetually hears our prayers and praises, and waits for us to reach the end of our journey and come home to His home in our own evening time. As we remember Him in the Sacrament, so He remembers us as our great Mediator.

This great remembrance should come more frequently to all true believers. The regular use of the means of grace is the greatest guarantee of joy in our souls and peace in our hearts. Remembering Him we can also remember His words on the night of the beginning of the Lord's Supper: "Fear not; I have overcome the world."