

# REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2014

## MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Scripture Versification 2-2:3

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm 23:1 - 3

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 19:6*

Law

Psalm: 19:6

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm 107:4

**Scripture reading:** Ephesians 1**Scripture text:** Ephesians 1:15-23; Catechism Sunday 25

We confess that we in ourselves do not have the devotion to believe. But God makes it possible for us to believe. He instructs us through His Word. And then He makes us see through His sacraments what He had taught us.

We see Paul in his inner-chamber. He prays.

- In his prayer he thanks God for all His grace by which He blesses all those who believe in Him.
- He thinks of every congregation in his prayer. His gratitude that the faith in the Lord Jesus is within them comes from the depth of his heart.
- He prays to God that this faith may increase among them and that they may constantly be strengthened within.

We also pray this way.

- In nearly every prayer we pray for the preservation of our faith, and that this faith may be strengthened.
- We also regularly thank God for it. Paul also gives thanks for the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which God works in hearts in Romans 1:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:4.

But we have to engage into this matter more thoroughly.

- We pray every day for food and clothing. And God provides. Every day we see this when we clothe ourselves.
- At each meal we ask God to bless the food that he has given us to prepare the meal.
- We thank God that we may leave the table satisfied.

Regarding our faith it is a different concern.

- It is not possible to look at our faith in the same way as to our food.
- We are continually taught that our lives are delivered from death – as we are being taught that there is relief from hunger in that we are provided with food.
- Because faith is not as tangible as food and clothing, God does provide tangible things by which our faith can be strengthened. *These are the sacraments.*

Every time when one receives something, the donor should immediately come to mind.

- This is what we must do when we receive the sacraments or when we listen to the preaching. We should think of God from Whom we receive these and thank Him for it.
- It may sound unnecessary, but even in our faith; we must know that we receive it as a gift from God, and that we can not bring it about by our own abilities.

God gives us our faith and strengthens it by using means. Fortunately not everything in our faith is abstract and invisible. Thus God proclaims His mercy to us.

- In my work I am blessed – this is evidence of the grace which God proclaims to us.
- Or my life or my future is in danger, and then it so happens that the threat passes my life.

- This is evidence by which I can see that what God promises to me, is true,
- although I can not see the promises.

In the same way God also gives the means of water, bread and wine to proclaim in the sacraments the significance of the redemption in Christ.

- Therefore the value of the sacraments is very important.
- The sacraments are not just something that was discovered by the church, or something which the church formulated and invented.
- The sacraments were institutionalised by God Himself and the institutionalisation thereof is recorded in the Bible.

On one occasion Jesus Christ fed a crowd of people. The crowds started to follow Jesus because he gave them food. Then Jesus said to them: **You follow Me not because the miracles that I had performed impress you so, but because I gave you bread when you were hungry.**

And then follows the touching words (John 6:29):

**"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."**

(John 6:29)

With the sacraments which are symbols of the work of Christ, it is exactly as with the bread with which Christ fed the crowd.

- God gave them, so that we therewith can believe in Him.
- In fact, the value of the sacraments is that they are used by the Holy Spirit to strengthen my faith.
  - When I sit down at Holy Communion, it is God the Holy Spirit who instructs my view: The body of Christ was broken and his blood was shed for my redemption.
  - Or with the water at baptism I am taught that the water cleanses my body, and it symbolises that Christ cleanses my soul from sin through His death.

God is powerful enough to teach us without any signs or symbols. But still it is significant that this is not the way He does it.

- He always uses signs. In Acts 9:17 we read that Ananias said to Paul that Christ had to appear to him on his way to Damascus so that Paul would believe in Him.
- The signs which were used here were the blinding sharp and bright light and the voice of God that spoke to him.

Another example is of Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian army division.

- In clear daylight he saw an angel of the Lord who came in to him and told him to send someone to Joppa to fetch Peter.
- Even Peter's address was given to him.

While Peter was waiting for the men, he was also instructed through signs: A sheet with all different kinds of unclean animals descended down to him where he was resting on the roof of the house.

- By this sign he was prepared for his mission to a gentile who, until this stage, was unclean in his eyes.
- In the same way the depth of the Gospel is worked and explained to us by the signs of the sacraments through God the Holy Spirit.

Without further debating about this, it is clear that the great value of the sacraments is that they strengthen our faith in God.

But immediately there is a risk in this matter. The sacraments do not have any more power than this.

- They are holy because they were ordained by God, but they cannot redeem you!
- The Holy Spirit is working the promises of the Gospel in you.
  - And the promises are that we are redeemed by Jesus Christ.
- The sacraments do not have this power.
  - Baptism cannot redeem you, and neither can the Holy Communion.

Therefore it is wrong not to go to church regularly, but to be promptly at every Communion.

- You cannot receive the assurance of God's promises if you do not regularly come to listen to the preaching of these promises. Because which promises are then proclaimed to you?
- It may well be that we then make use of the sacraments as charms or as signs of superstition in the way some people use them these days.
  - We hold on to the Holy Communion and the Baptism with everything in us as if our redemption can thereby be determined.
  - It is a sin to overrate the sacraments so greatly.

Our contemplation and preservation of the sacraments should always be well balanced.

- On the one side we should guard against overrating.
- But it definitely does not mean that we now may take the point of view that the sacraments do not have any power.

We should always remember that the sacraments do have power, because they were ordained by God.

- The power which is in the sacraments is that every sacrament is a sermon of God's covenant promises.
- They are true signs and seals – in other words, confirmation that the promises of God are true.
- They are used by God to make” us understand the promises of the Gospel better...” – They strengthen and increase our faith.

These sacraments would have had no meaning if they were not ordained by God.

- Therefore we have only two sacraments, namely the Baptism and the Holy Communion. There are churches with more sacraments, but the others are all only part of tradition. Totally worthless. Because nowhere in the Bible do we learn about their establishment.

- The sacraments have another power. That is to teach the grace of God to His children in particular.

The Gospel is preached to all people.

- Believers and unbelievers hear it.
- The sacraments are only for those who believe in particular. They are a very close affirmation of grace, which people who stand outside this relationship, cannot share.

God is the power of the sacraments. The use of the sacraments is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The part of the Christian doctrine which is the most difficult to understand, is the part about the forgiveness from sin which we receive by the sacrifice of Christ.
- Therefore the use of the sacraments lie therein that they exactly elucidate this part of the Gospel.
- The sacraments are to make us understand that we are cleansed, so that we can show our gratitude towards the Giver of our redemption.

The sacraments are also the visible expression of the unity of God's church.

- The Holy Communion is also a meal of unity. Then the gratitude which we demonstrate is not only mine, but it is the gratitude of the church towards God.
- The unity of the gratitude of the church and its obedience is also revealed through the Sacraments.
- The practice of the sacraments also has the aim to make one answers to the highest purpose for which he was created, namely to glorify God.

Further we could also say in good faith that the sacraments indicate in a certain way the separation among people.

- For many it is the affirmation of the forgiveness of their sins.
- But by the power of exclusion given to the church others are kept from using the sacraments if they persist in their sin.
- Those who persist in sin but who nevertheless come to sit at the table or who let their children be baptised because of superstition, bring judgement over themselves. In other words, to confirm God's wrath over them.

How do the sacraments work in our lives? God demands faith. And because we in ourselves are not able to be faithful, He provides the means to strengthen our faith.

- Therefore we should receive the sacraments in our weakness, but by the power of God.
- We may not attach magical powers to the sacraments, but we should keep them sacred.
- To live my life in such a way that I prove through my life that the Gospel of redemption is proclaimed to me and the sacraments are visibly confirmed to me.
- Everybody can see my redemption by the Lord Jesus in my life in my battle against everything which is evil.

Come, let us look what we confess about this in Catechism Sunday 25:

Sunday 25

**65. Q. Since then faith alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, where does this faith come from?**

**A.** From the Holy Spirit,[1] who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel,[2] and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.[3]

[1] John 3:5; I Cor. 2:10-14; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29. [2] Rom. 10:17; I Pet. 1:23-25. [3] Matt. 28:19, 20; I Cor. 10:16.

**66. Q. What are the sacraments**

**A.** The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel.[1] And this is the promise: that God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.[2]

[1] Gen. 17:11; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 4:11 [2] Matt. 26:27, 28; Acts 2:38; Heb. 10:10.

**67. Q. Are both the Word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?**

**A.** Yes, indeed. The Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and assures us by the sacraments that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.[1]

[1] Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 11:26; Gal. 3:27.

**68. Q. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant?**

**A.** Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.[1]

[1] Matt. 28:19, 20; I Cor. 11:23-26. Holy Baptism

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Song: Scripture Versification 10-2 [Our Father]

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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