

Vision



Dear brothers and sisters,

I would like to reflect on the story and message from our Chief Apostle on Pentecost concerning the woman and the crumbs. We can find this incident with Jesus in both Mark 7 and Matthew 15 and I encourage you to read them both and consider three thoughts – *faith, humility, and non-entitlement*.

In short, a Gentile woman had a daughter with an unclean spirit. She came to the Lord, asking for mercy and worshipped Him. He responded, unexpectedly, that the children (Jews) should be fed first, before the little dogs. Unoffended, she said that *even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table*. Thereafter, the Lord exclaimed, *O woman, great is your faith!* He told her to go her way, her daughter is healed. The Chief Apostle explained that with her response, she expressed that she would be satisfied with the crumbs. Continuing, he said that if God gives us crumbs, we will be blest with crumbs.

There are many dimensions to this event. First, the woman recognized Jesus as the Lord and worshipped Him. Even though she was not a Jew, **she had faith** in His power. She realized that Jesus was her only hope for help, so she fell before Him, begging for mercy. When Jesus responded to her, *she did not turn away* aggravated or discouraged because of His reproach, even referring to Gentiles as “little dogs.” **Humbly**, yet undeterred, in her last words to Jesus, she exposed that she was **not entitled** to anything, “*Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*” She would be happy and satisfied with the crumbs, realizing that they were from *the Master's table!*

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In light of this, let's consider the words of the late Chief Apostle Walter Schmidt – "All was grace, all is grace, all will remain grace." Dear ones, we must reckon with these simple facts; we deserve nothing, we can claim nothing, we can bring nothing. *All O Lord, art Thou!*¹ One of the personal battles that we must fight every day is to humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus and fight against the zeitgeist of entitlement. This woman realized her unworthiness and accepted to be called a dog! She resigned herself to this inferior position, recognizing the crumbs from *His table* would be sufficient for her.

Do we have the faith and trust in the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus, that with seemingly very little (two fish and five loaves), He can do great things (feeding the 5,000)? Shall we not be satisfied, even in this time of suffering, with the "daily bread" that He provides? Imagine, "crumbs" from the living Bread of heaven! We can trust that what God provides for us is *enough* to sustain us.

Faith, humility, and non-entitlement. Jesus Christ is our all-sufficient Savior and Helper.

I miss our singing together.

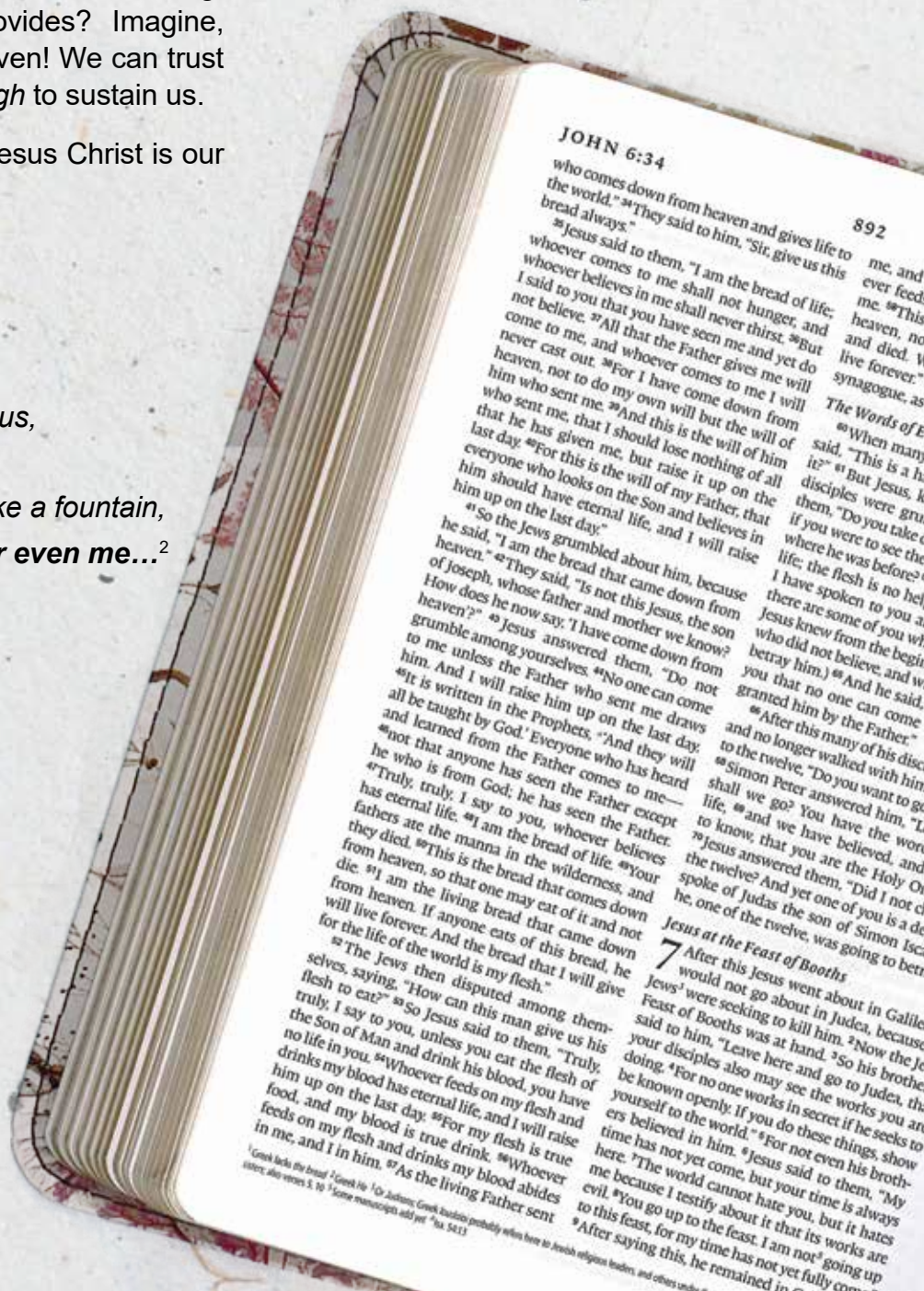
Please join with me in this refrain:

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
deeper than the mighty rolling sea,
Higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain,
All sufficient grace, for even me, for even me...²*

With love

¹ From the hymn, *Star to which I'm looking*

² From the hymn, *Wonderful grace of Jesus*



WHAT WILL YOU LOOK BACK ON?

What will be said about the year 2020 when we look back on it years from now? For sure, we will think about the pandemic that our world was afflicted by and how our everyday lives were changed. How we were locked away in our homes and kept from our families, friends, and workplaces. We may reflect on the missed celebrations, vacations, and events, that seemingly were robbed from us. Some will remember this year and still celebrate because of the birth of children, graduations from high school or college, and marriages. But ultimately, many may look back upon 2020 and consider it a wasted year.

Yet, we would be remiss not to take the time now to look towards God and recognize that in these days, He has been with us, He has been working, and that each day of 2020 had purpose. The purpose is the same for God's children no matter what is happening in the world around us. We are to be disciples of Christ and glorify Him in all we do. And certainly, during this time, we have been afforded the opportunity to share the love of God and the light of Jesus Christ, and to glorify His name. We can do that because we have been reborn by water and Spirit. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell within His disciples so that they could live out His mission and fulfill their purpose – to glorify God.

This year is not a wasted year. We can resolve to make this our best year yet because we know that our God is with us, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, *we can grow in our personal relationship with God* and deepen our faith.

In the word service that was broadcasted on April 19, the District Apostle mentioned five areas of focus that we can strive to grow in to make this year memorable.

1 First, let us focus on learning about the **POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** in our lives. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and God the Holy Spirit accompanies us throughout our life. Do we feel Him prompting us when to speak, where to go, and what to do? Do we fully trust in Him to help us to speak the truth about Jesus? And in difficult times, do we still recognize His presence and allow Him to turn our distress into joy? We encourage each one to begin every day by seeking the presence of God's Spirit and daily surrendering to Him. Then you will grow in your knowledge of His power. During the craziness of this time that challenges us with the noise of the media and the boredom of being quarantined, *the power of the Spirit gives us a sound mind* that helps us to make decisions by remaining calm, peaceful, and steady.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7



2 Second, let us focus on our **PRAYER** life and learn to really pray with depth and substance, like we have never done before. As we grow in our relationship with God, we learn more about His nature, and that knowledge deepens our prayers. We recognize more and more how great and awesome He is. We know that He initiates this interaction through the power of the Spirit, and so we are confident that He hears us as His children. Because we know that our God is sovereign and omnipotent, we know we can trust Him with all things, and therefore, we can learn to pray with deeper expression, pouring out our heart to Him. Through prayer, we worship Him and give Him praise. And through prayer, He strengthens and changes us. What a beautiful relationship this is!

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

3 Third, let's focus on learning about our **FAMILY** and deepening our relationship with one another by sharing together what the Lord Jesus means to us. Spouses, talk to each other about your faith in Jesus Christ and learn together how your relationship with Him helps to strengthen the bond of your relationship. Parents, talk with your children about what God has done for us through His Son, and discover ways to demonstrate the love of God to the world around you, so that you can glorify Him together as a family. Children, talk to your parents about Jesus. Tell them why you love Jesus and encourage them to continue to grow in their relationship with Him. How wonderful it would be that at the end of this year, each family would truly know that they are secure in the hands of God and moving together forward under His blessing.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6





4 Fourth, strive to recognize and learn that none of us can walk the journey of faith alone. We need our **BROTHERS AND SISTERS** in faith. This year, let us learn to value one another and recognize that we are here together to help one another, to nudge, to pick up and encourage, to celebrate together, to grieve and mourn together, and to fulfill the will of God together. Strive to be able to see each other as God sees us and learn to utilize each one's gifts to edify the body of Christ.

Therefore, let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Romans 14:19

5 Our fifth and final focus is that during this year we develop a never-ending hunger to continuously experience true fellowship with Jesus Christ in **HOLY COMMUNION**. That we recognize that each time we celebrate this meal with Him, we remember His life and death, the all-encompassing and eternal sacrifice, which sets us free from sin and brings us into a life-giving relationship with God. Let the desire to join in this fellowship with our Savior and our congregations to grow and deepen, so that we value every opportunity we have to share in the remembrance and celebration of Him.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17



The year 2020 does not have to be one that is remembered as a lost year. It can be a time we look back on and recall the graciousness and goodness of God and embrace the treasures that He provided us with to take along into the future. – **MJB**

To rewatch this sermon from the District Apostle, visit our NAC USA YouTube page.

The following is a summary of For Your Journey Episode 82. If you'd like to watch this video with District Apostle Kolb, go to our YouTube channel, New Apostolic Church USA, and click on the For Your Journey playlist.

Grief is the sense of loss we can feel at different times in our lives; it is most pronounced with the loss of a loved one.

Faith can help us cope with grief; however, it never eliminates it because grief is a product of love. John 11 illustrates this in the account of Lazarus' death. Jesus, as true Man, wept over his death. That momentary separation caused Him pain, even though He knew He had the power to bring Lazarus back to life.

As human beings, we experience emotions deeply. Thus, when someone passes away, a funeral or memorial service serves to help with the grieving process and give us closure. However, in the current circumstances, those services cannot happen in the customary ways.

As a way to adapt, a restricted funeral may be possible, while others might prefer to wait until regular services can resume. The uncertainty of when this might happen can also be unsettling.

It should be known that our belief in a funeral service, the body is returned to the earth and the soul is commended into the care of Christ – these words *give us comfort* as we are assured that the soul is in the hands of God. However, it is imperative to understand that in the moment of death, the almighty God has already acted and placed the soul and spirit into the realm in which they need to be, according to His will. The soul is never in an undetermined state until the funeral service can take place. *God acts because He cares for and loves all souls.* In addition, He understands our grief and will always comfort us.



Love One Another

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

Jesus' words in John 13 are a defining characteristic of what it means to be a true Christian. We are called to love our neighbor, not just when it's convenient or easy, but when it requires effort and sacrifice.

We may have used these past few months of being quarantined and isolated from others as a reason why we may need to be more focused on ourselves and are unable to serve others in ways we would under normal circumstances. And yet, a pandemic is not an excuse to forego the command of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it gives us the opportunity to be more creative in the ways that we demonstrate Jesus' love towards one another.

Following are some examples of unique ways that members across the country have been able to serve their neighbors. May these stories be an inspiration as we all look for ways to serve and love each other over the coming months.

The Sunday School group in the Schaumburg congregation were able to meet regularly for their Spring lessons through Zoom. Each teacher put in extra effort to make the lessons more engaging and interactive for the students. For one lesson on letting the light of God in, the students were asked to build forts in their homes to watch and listen to the lesson in. And for Mother's Day, the teacher mailed out a packet of materials beforehand so students could use these to create their own Mother's Day cards.

During the month of June, the Clifton congregation in New Jersey allowed the city to use the church parking lot as a site for free coronavirus testing. Talk to your rector about how the congregation can use your church space for community activities.

A youth group in Florida had a virtual bake-off in May. A recipe was sent out a week ahead to give the youth time to buy all their ingredients. Each one connected to Zoom from their kitchens, and during the time while their cookies were baking, the youth leader led a discussion with the youth and their families on different spiritual topics.

- VAA



CLOSER TOGETHER

THE DISTRICT APOSTLE RELATED THE FOLLOWING STORY TO US:

Several years ago, in my local congregation, my father was invited to talk with some of the Sunday school students for what they called “children’s church.” It was a chance for members to speak and connect with the children in the congregation. As my father was a retired minister, most of the students were expecting a discussion that was akin to preaching. However, when they got together, my father told them stories related to the sermon theme, they actually talked with each other, and there was laughing and true connection.

A few years later, as my father was in the hospital during his last days, one of the boys, who had shared the experience with my father years before in that discussion, was moved to go with his father for this visit. He took this time and ended up being the last person to pray with my father.

In these two experiences, I don’t just see an older man and a young boy spending time together. I see two souls connecting with one another in their love for Christ, the motivating power behind both of their actions. It did not matter that there was almost 70 years separating them. This is what it means to be part of the the body of Christ: working in His love for one another, providing for each other’s needs, and, in the process, pastorally caring for each other despite age, race, class, education, etc. because this is what Christ has called His disciples to do.

Instead of celebrating and embracing our diversity, we often focus too much on what makes us different, and thus, limit ourselves in reaching out to those around us. Only with an open mind and heart can we invest our time, energy, and resources in other people to demonstrate our love for them and encourage them to see and develop in the ways of Christ.

THIS IDEA IS ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND OUR FAITH ARC INITIATIVE...

...which is a strategy that supports the continual development of a soul as is transitions through different life stages, with an emphasis on children, youth, and young adults. We seek to foster a culture of learning that is continuous, where each person in their season of life (including higher age) can continue to learn and grow, and also help others to do the same. This requires a relationship to exist among all in the congregation. God gave us the community of believers, and proper stewardship of this gift from Him enables us to use those relationships to grow.

We have seen an example of this in one of our congregations. A group of seniors, inspired by a message in a divine service, got together and decided that they would try to help the younger members in their congregation as much as possible. Among these younger members are some who have moved from the Congo over the past years and are still new to life in America. A few times a year, the



senior group takes time to meet with this group of Congolese and other members who are in their early 20s to discuss with them things that can be helpful for their day-to-day lives. They have discussed topics, such as building financial health, how to file taxes, and understanding social styles, which impacts how people behave and interact with one another. The dedication of these senior members, who answered the call to connect with younger generations, displays the love of Christ in a unique way as the relationships between these seemingly different groups of people continues to grow.

In addition to the examples we might see around us on the importance of growing and investing in the relationships we have with fellow believers, Deuteronomy also gives us guidance on this growth: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up...* (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

We can expand these verses beyond parents raising children in their homes and apply this *call of action* to all members of the “family,” i.e. the community of believers. It is up to all of us to ensure that as children transition into youth and young adult life, they know the love and teachings of God, and they feel supported and encouraged in their journey of faith. And, further, it is important that we are *diligent* in this work, as Deuteronomy says, continuously teaching the ways of God at all times and in all situations. Not only does this help our children to learn and grow, but it is also a way that we can offer praise to God,

by speaking of Him and sharing His word and our experiences of faith with others.

There are many benefits when we bridge the “gap” between generations.

- When we intentionally take time to connect with others, we build relationships, which allows trust and love to develop and grow. Then as time moves on, we now have people we can turn to for encouragement, support, and help.
- Proverbs 22:6 tells us, when we invest in children and help them to learn the ways of God, this remains with them throughout their lives, especially in times of difficulty, building on a foundation of trust and hope in God in any season of life.
- We share our faith down through the generations. In Psalm 89:1, we read, *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.* When we experience God’s goodness in our lives, we share that with others. Continuously praising Him in our lifestyle, i.e. remaining humble and owing all success to Him, gives us the opportunity to pass the source of joy down to others.
- We learn more about the world, and even ourselves, when we expose ourselves to the experiences of others. This is especially true as we connect with those who are older or younger than we are, as they have lived through or grown up in different times. Learning about others helps us to appreciate that God has created and gifted each person uniquely and that He loves each one equally.



We come to realize that we are all the church, all the time. It is our mission *to reach out to all people*, and even though at times, we enjoy connection with those closer to our age or interests, **we must strive to cross over any boundaries and embrace all whom the Lord brings our way.** Our fellowship should become more and more inclusive and deepen the connections between us. It is our desire to be together, and this became more painfully evident as we experienced the pandemic over the past time. It forced us to find new ways to interact with each other, outside of the divine service, using the means available to us.

We strive to prepare for and experience the return of Christ. We seek to know our Savior more intimately, to feel our Father's power more majestically, and to rely on the Holy Spirit more intensively. This time period, like all that have preceded it, may seem to have unique challenges when it comes to connecting with and offering pastoral care to others. There are limitless demands on limited resources. Nevertheless, in each challenging time, bold and decisive people were required who could rise to the challenge.

Let's allow the compassion God has for us to inspire us to overcome and embrace the differences that are among us. In the love of Christ, we can accept, understand, build relationships with, and offer care to others. - [VAA/TDL](#)



True Fellowship

A relationship,

A close-up photograph of a glass filled with red wine, sitting on a rustic wooden table. A piece of bread is partially visible next to the glass. The lighting is warm and natural, highlighting the textures of the wood and the liquid in the glass.

Fellowship

not an activity.

What is fellowship? We use this word often in our circles, but it has evolved over time away from its original meaning. Today, fellowship has come to mean little more than an informal social gathering, often over food. We say fondly, “where there is food - there is fellowship!” A standard dictionary definition of the word fellowship is “a friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interest.” This type of gathering is enjoyable and encouraged. However, when we compare it to the fellowship that those in the first church prioritized, we can see very clearly that we are often missing the mark in our use of the term. The early Christians gave it a much deeper meaning.

Let us examine the word fellowship in the context of the New Testament. The Greek word in the Bible for fellowship is *koinonia*, which is most commonly translated into English as “communion” and “sharing a common life.” This gives us a different understanding of fellowship than the dictionary definition above. True fellowship goes much deeper than being friendly or spending time with those who like what we like. *It is a relationship, not an activity.* It denotes participation or sharing rather than simply an association with others. In the German Bible, the word used for fellowship is translated as “many sharing life” or “many sharing a purpose.” Here we find the true intention of the word. Fellowship means sharing life and sharing purpose.

For Christians, fellowship means sharing in the life of Christ! He, alone, gives us a shared purpose and a shared goal.

Recognizing our dependence on Christ deepens our experience of communion with Him, which in turn establishes and enriches our fellowship with one another. As we begin to understand the wonder of Christ’s love and His desire to share His life with us, it inspires us to connect with, commune, and understand each other. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians: *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others* (Philippians 2:1-4 NIV).



How do we experience this fellowship?

Through our participation in Holy Communion. **This is true fellowship—communion with Christ.** No other moments compare with this one; it is the purest form of fellowship that we can experience on this earth. The bread and wine are not merely metaphors or symbols for the body and blood of Christ. Instead, the body and blood of Christ are joined to the bread and the wine and Christ becomes truly present in Holy Communion. Every time we partake of Holy Communion, it is a visible expression of our sharing in the life of Christ.

We can see the significance of the sacrament in this verse from Paul: *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread* (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Chief Apostle Schneider recently said, “...when we come together and celebrate Holy Communion, our fellowship with God is strengthened, and our fellowship with one another is strengthened. Our fellowship with God is strengthened because we realize that we are dependent on Him. We also share in the merit of Christ. We weren’t victorious over sin, Christ was. Yet He allows us to share in His victory. This brings us closer to Him.” This is also expressed in our Catechism, which reminds us that Holy Communion is a meal of fellowship. In Holy Communion, Jesus has fellowship with His Apostles and with the believers, and, moreover, the believers have fellowship with each other (CNAC 8.2.10). Holy Communion is a meal of direct and intimate fellowship with the Savior, and we share in it together.

What a gratuitous, undeserved gift from God! In Holy Communion, we have the experience that St. Augustine noted: *He loves each of us as if there were only one of us.* Each child of God has the privilege of enjoying intimate fellowship with Christ as if they were the sole object of His affections. This is most personally experienced in Holy Communion when we hear the words,

How is it possible to have fellowship with Christ?

The triune God embodies perfect unity and fellowship. He created us to be in relationship and invites us into the fellowship of the Trinity. In 1 Corinthians 1:9, we read: *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* Through the sacrament of baptism, God brings us into His nearness. He also establishes us into a community of believers, the Church. One can only be a Christian in a collective sense; there can be no “individual” Christian. God created us to be in community. We need each other to learn to love one another the way Christ taught us to love, and in so doing, experience His kingdom already now.

As Christians, we are united in fellowship with Christ. The believer is united to Christ in such a way that he or she participates in all the virtue and power of the risen and glorified Lord! We share in the very life of Christ Himself. *He* is the vine, and *we* are the branches. *He* is the head, and *we* are the body. We are spiritually a part of Him, *for we are members of His body.* This is the common life that we share as believers - the life of Jesus Christ. **Christ is the basis and the essence of our fellowship!** He is what connects us; there is no fellowship without Him.

In our baptism, we are invited into the fellowship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The body and blood of Jesus given for you. Jesus' closest disciples were able to experience this true fellowship with the Lord first-hand when He instituted Holy Communion during the Last Supper, and they were forever changed.



How does fellowship with Christ change us?

In the transformative moments of Holy Communion, we are given the strength to “put on” the virtues of Christ: *tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another...but above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection* (Colossians 3:12). That which we freely receive in Christ, we are to share with others freely. Thus, Holy Communion inspires our relationships with one another. Our fellowship in Christ unifies us; it is what makes us Christians! Holy Communion also gives us the strength to *walk in the newness of life*, which does not make us sinless, but as we overcome our will with God's, it will help us sin less.

As mentioned earlier, fellowship means a shared life, purpose, and goal, which we find in Christ and with His believers, and which inevitably overflows into our thoughts and actions.

We seek out opportunities for spiritual conversations and sharing. Whether it is in a small group setting, a one-on-one conversation in the back of the church, or with family members in the living room or around the kitchen table, one of the most important things we can do to build up and encourage one another is to talk about the new life we share in Jesus Christ. Chief Apostle Schneider

inspires us “...to let our faith come to expression in our congregations, and thereby comfort and strengthen one another...Let us please talk about our deep, simple faith: I believe in the resurrection. I believe in Jesus Christ, and I want to be there!” We speak of our shared goal—to be with Christ. Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15, *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...* As we together learn from Christ, we also learn from one another. When we share things of spiritual substance, we grow and mature in our faith and relationship with God, while also encouraging our neighbor to do the same.

Our fellowship with Christ also inspires us to serve the Lord together, to share our spiritual gifts and material possessions, and to join our voices in song and prayer. The early Christians recognized the value of serving and sharing in these ways. They desired to be united in Christ in everything they did. Unity in Christ is something that we must also pursue and practice. Apostle Paul often exhorted his congregations to these behaviors: *I...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all* (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Intentionally pursuing true fellowship with Christ and with each other is critical for our spiritual growth and health as individuals and the growth and health of the church; it goes much deeper than coffee and cake. Deep, abiding fellowship with the Lord and with one another *edifies, sustains, and is rich in substance*, giving us a *foretaste* of the intimate and eternal fellowship that we hope to experience in God's kingdom to come.

It's true that words matter. They shape and define our actions and thoughts. When we use the word fellowship, may our thoughts go toward Holy Communion and the intimate fellowship we have with Christ in these life-changing and life-giving moments. - MNJ/LRK

The background of the page is a vibrant, abstract collage. It features a large, light blue circle in the upper left filled with small, dark blue dots. To its right is a solid red circle. Below the red circle is a black circle with a white dot inside. In the upper right corner, there's a light blue circle and a green circle. The bottom half of the page is dominated by large, flowing, organic shapes in shades of orange, red, and blue, resembling stylized leaves or petals. A large green leaf shape is on the right side. A yellow circle is positioned near the bottom center. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic, with a mix of geometric and organic forms in a warm color palette.

Reflecting on Thanksgiving

This year so far has provided many moments for reflection. In light of all that has happened, what can we be thankful for? What blessings has God given that we can praise Him for?

Being confined to our homes for some time of the year, we have been given many opportunities for growth, both individually and within our families. Perhaps some took up a new hobby or simply enjoyed the chance to eat dinner together as a family more often. Some may have read the Scriptures more, or carved time out of each day to sing together songs of worship to God. **Every moment we have spent deepening our relationship with God and with our family members is a moment to be thankful for.**

Naturally, with more down time to reflect, we may have found ourselves thinking of distant family, friends, or acquaintances with whom we have lost regular contact. Many took this opportunity to call, text, or even video chat with some of these people, reaching out to them to catch up and express that they were in their thoughts. **What wonderful opportunities God has provided for us to share love with our neighbor and perhaps find ways to encourage and serve them.**

For many, the pandemic and other situations throughout the year have given people an abundance of new experiences. Whether it was dealing with job loss, becoming a student who learned solely at home, meeting new babies in the family, seeing long lines and empty shelves at the grocery store, planning events that you weren't sure would even be able to happen, getting married... Truly the list can go on. Some experiences were filled with joy, and some were more of a struggle than others. **If we depended on God and let each experience draw us closer to our Father, we could allow Him to guide our path as we sought to know Him and His will more.**

Through God's grace, He has provided for us through strange and difficult times this year, sustaining us with His love and strength. While we can experience this strength and the presence of God even during this time when we are unable to celebrate Holy Communion, we still desire to experience intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ. We do not want to look at the time spent away from the full experience of the divine service as time that we "missed out" on fellowship, or worship, or Holy Communion. Rather, we can be thankful for the opportunities that we do have to celebrate the sacrament, knowing that it is not something we deserve, but that God has given us a gift that we long to partake in. **May our longing for this fellowship with Christ and one another deepen our feelings and understanding whenever we are able to celebrate this sacrament together again.**

With increased time spent at home or isolated from the people we normally see on a day-to-day basis, we have learned that people need community. Paul says in Hebrews 10:24-25 – *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* **We can offer thanks to God for the recognition that we truly love one another,** and that, even when it's not always possible, we have a desire to be together – with our family and friends, with our congregation, and with our community.

As we consider all that we have to be thankful for, contemplate these lyrics from the hymn, "Doxology." How will you praise God for the blessings He has bestowed on you?

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him, all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

- VAA



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*More information
will be coming soon!*

