Text: Christian Questions and Their Answers 1-6

**Introduction**

They tend not to get much attention. In catechism class we spend all our time on the six chief parts: 10 commandments, Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Confession and the Lord’s Supper. Maybe your parents taught you the morning and evening prayers. You occasionally find someone who stumbles across the Table of Duties and everything in the faith gets focused through the idea of vocation. Which you could find worse filters. But rarely do we get past the subscription on the Christian Questions with their Answers. The catechism in the hymnal in large type says “prepared by Dr. Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament.” And then in brackets informs us that the questions first appeared in the Small Catechism in 1551, five years after Luther’s death. In other words, safely ignore.

But Luther often answered questions in private letters. Like when his barber kept asking him how to pray, and he eventually answers him in a gem called “A Simple Way to Pray.” Given that Luther’s last question under the Sacrament of the Altar is “Who receives the Sacrament Worthily?” And the Apostle Paul in his instructions tells us to “examine ourselves”. A practical question like “how do I do this?” is almost an automatic. Especially when the emphasis on how the sacraments worked was polished up in the Reformation.

Prior to the reformation if you asked how does it work? You probably would just have gotten the response “it does, stop asking questions.” And if you persisted that was the purpose of the bells. It was magic. When the priest said “Hoc est corpus meum”, from where we get “Hocus Pocus”, and the altar boy rang the bell, you got what the sacrament delivered. Luther never denies the objective reality of the sacraments – they are means of grace. But as with almost everything he emphasizes faith. We receive that grace by faith. So if I’m examining my faith, how do I know it is worthy?

That used to be a real big concern. If you followed John Calvin or the Radical Reformation there was always this inward turn to examine your heart. How do you know? What does your heart tell you. The problems with that are two fold. First, our salvation does not come from inside of us. It comes from outside of us. Christ applied to us. What is inside of us is often unknowable even to ourselves. Second, giving Calvin the benefit of the doubt, what he was really saying was examine yourselves. The problem being that a good examination of the self depends upon a proper formation. You don’t tell a 5 year old to make dinner by following a recipe. Even if they can read, that 5 year old has not been formed to follow the recipe. And many Christian simply lack the proper formation for a true examination.

**Text**

So placing into the catechism an example of self-examination is completely in line with the pastoral Luther. And in a penitential season it is worth everyone walking through them together.

The first six that we cover tonight are groundwork of grace and the simple gospel proclamation.

Do you believe that you are a sinner? As Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The healthy don’t need a doctor but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” If you think you are completely fine, then the sacraments or the gospel are not for you. Christ came for sinners.

Ok, maybe I sense that something is off. But how do I know? That is a consistent question: how do I know? The fancy word is epistemology. And the basis of all Christian epistemology is the Word of God. And the Word that we have closest at hand is the scripture. In the case of being a sinner, a look at the 10 commandments. And I’d add today that if you think you’ve kept them, read the Sermon on the mount. But anyone honest should answer “I have not kept them.”

But this gets to the real start of faith. Does the fact that I am a sinner and in no way have kept the 10 commandments impact me in any what. Does the fear of God grab me? Are you sorry for your sins? If the answer is no, the sacraments and the proclamation are not for you. If the idea that you have trespassed almighty God doesn’t cause terror, I can’t pile up words to induce it. All I can do is pronounce the sentence.

What have we deserved from God because of our sins? His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Hear solemn warning.

**Application**

Because there is good news. Can you hope to be saved?

If our cause was hopeless, you should shut me up. If we had no way of being saved, you would be right in telling me to stop reminding all of us of the judgement. Let the hills cover us as some in revelation cry. But our cause is not hopeless.

Why is it not hopeless? I can’t stop sinning. Death seems to reign. We walk in danger all the way.

Because my dear Lord Jesus Christ by death on that cross defeated death. By the blood that you receive in the sacrament has forgiven our sins. By your baptism has buried you in his death, so that you will likewise rise from the dead.

Why is it not hopeless? Because God promised us a savior. And God keeps his promises. As he did in Jesus Christ. Christ came for sinners. In him can we trust.

We will continue our examination of ourselves next week. Amen.