**Introduction**

The Apostle Paul tells us to examine ourselves before we receive the Lord’s Supper. And the central concern of Paul’s in that command is that we discern the Body of Christ. And I like that English word discern because I think that it implies at least a couple of things. First it implies that what is going on is not immediately obvious. You don’t know just by observation. Nor do you know simply by doing. Discerning means engaging your rational self. Second discern means making judgements or distinctions.

But both thinking well and making good judgments requires a some formation. And I’m using that word formation on purpose. I think we would usually say learning or teaching, but both of those we just take as mental practices today. Formation still has some sense that we are more than just a mind, that we have a body and a soul or a will. And that to make proper judgements requires a bit of all body, mind and spirit.

And so the catechism gives us an example of a proper self examination. Last week we covered the start of it and at least for receiving the benefits of the Lord’s Supper those early questions were the important ones. They admitted that “yes, I am a sinner.” And they asked for trust or faith in Jesus Christ as our one hope. If any of you have experience with American Evangelicalism, this is simply the sinner’s prayer in Lutheran catechism form.

**Who is Christ?**

Tonight though we are going to continue with the catechism’s example of self-examination. In order to properly discern the body of Christ, it starts with faith – without faith we can’t really discern Spiritual things as Jesus said in last Sunday’s gospel, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (Jn. 3:12 ESV)” But to properly discern the Body of Christ requires faith seeking understanding.

And so the first question tonight asks who is Christ, the one in whom we trust? And the answer it gives is two fold. First, Christ is the Son of God. To discern the Body of Christ requires that we know how God has revealed himself to us in three persons. And second, to discern the body of Christ requires that we know Christ is true God and man. There are two natures in one Christ.

Why can we have hope in Christ? Because he is God. Why can we have hope in Christ? Because he is our brother. A God who is not our brother might as well be Islam’s Allah, or Lovecraft’s Cthulhu. Who knows our fate. But Christ is our brother who understands what we are. Likewise a brother who is not God may be a great companion. No one will ever know us better. But we would still be in the same lost situation. We can have the hope that lives in us because Christ is both God and our brother.

But this Son of God is confusing. How many Gods are there? The Jews and the Muslims are quite emphatic that there is one God. Even the philosophers come around to this. While the wild pagans find many gods, just find the one that resonates with you. Discerning the body of Christ means a little bit of both-and. How many Gods are there? Only one, but there are three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Don't worry about rationally understanding it. If you think you rationally understand the Trinity, you don’t have the Trinity. It’s a mystery. It is something we know by revelation alone.

Ok, if I accept this mystery. It is something to be contemplated but not completely understood. What then can I know? We can know what the persons of God have done for us.

What has Christ done for us that we trust in him? He died for me and shed his blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

There are lots of questions that we can follow from there. How did God die? Christ, according to his human nature, bled and died. And since Christ is both God and man – God experienced death. And he did this for us. Why would anyone who was God experience death? So that he could forgive us. Christ alone was the blameless worthy lamb of God. How does this inspire trust? At least for me, instead of God forever hiding, right there we know the depth of his love. If He loves me this much, trust is pretty easy.

But let’s get back to that three persons thing. If Christ did this, does that also mean the Father did? Did the Father also die for us? No. United in substance they are one God, but the The Father is not the son nor the Spirit. Christ alone died and shed his blood. And tonight we are discerning Christ as much as The Father and the Holy Spirit might be fruitful examination.

Ok, but how do we know this?

From the Holy Gospel. (I might add here because this is the Spirit’s testimony to Christ.) Because Christ left us his testament. It is in the Word and in his new covenant in the Sacrament. Which Christ himself says is his body and blood given for the forgiveness of sins.

But how can this be? A very Nicodemus type question. According to his humanity he has flesh and blood. According to his divinity he can be anywhere. God says he’s in the supper. He promises that he is and will always be there. And that this blood is for us. It is where we meet God and receive the forgiveness of sins. In a very bodily way.

**Conclusion**

Self-examination is almost always recursive. You push a further out, and then you have to fall back to more secure answers. The examination tonight pushed way out. This is the God we worship as He has revealed himself. And one place we must discern the Body of Christ is in the sacrament that he has given to us.

Do you believe this?

That is the falling back…and that is where we will continue next week. Amen.