

Share God's Gift of Love

February is the month when Valentine's Day is celebrated and so we think of "love". A few weeks ago we celebrated Christmas – the occasion that marked God's great love gift to the world, His only-begotten Son. Jesus took our human flesh and form, and offered His life as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. This act of sacrificial love led a hymn writer to pen: "What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!" (HS98 860)

The love of Jesus is far more wondrous than we can ever describe or imagine, much less imitate and practice. The best that we can do is respond with our free and joyous stewardship. True Christian stewardship is not something that we do because of laws, rules and commands. It is always a response to the love of God for us. The Apostle John said it so well: "We love because He first loved us."

So, when Valentine's Day reminds us of human love, we do well to pause and reflect on the divine love of Jesus. By the power and presence of the Holy Spirit we are equipped to show our love through deeds and words that support and encourage.

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes. Let your love show in your giving of time, talent and financial resources to God's glory and the expansion of His kingdom.

Why Do We Do That?

This is the second in a series of articles Lutheran customs and practices. Do you have an idea for a church practice you would like explained? Suggest it to Pastor Becker.

Creeds

The question has been asked, "Why do we use the Nicene Creed in services with Holy Communion and use the Apostles' Creed in services without Communion?"

The Apostle's and the Nicene Creeds are traditionally thought of as being connected to the two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion.

The Apostle's Creed developed in the early church as a summary of the teaching of the Apostles and was used from the beginning to teach those who were to be baptized. As the common faith of all the baptized, it is the creed commonly used for weekdays and other services as a reminder to live in our Baptism.

The Nicene Creed was written after the Council of Nicea in the fourth century, in response to heresies about how Christ is God. It became the creed commonly used on Sundays and major festivals (Christmas, etc.). In historic tradition, Holy Communion was celebrated every Sunday and on major festivals. Since the Nicene Creed was used on these occasions, it continues to be used in services which include Holy Communion. It is more specific about the person of

Christ, who comes to us in this sacrament with his body and blood. The act of communing together expresses our unity of faith with those who commune with us, a faith summarized in the Nicene Creed.

There are three "ecumenical creeds" used by Lutherans and other Christians. The third, the Athanasian Creed (page 134 in Lutheran Worship), is even more specific and detailed regarding the nature of the trinity and the incarnation of the Christ. It is traditionally used once a year, on Trinity Sunday.

On the topic of creeds, another question could be asked about the wording in the third article: "I believe in the...holy Christian Church." In the original text the wording is "the holy catholic Church" (catholic with a small "c"). The word "catholic" means "universal" or "worldwide". This refers not to the denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, but to all true believers in Christ. Using the word "Christian" rather than "catholic" is not a reaction of the Reformation, but originated in Germany long before the Reformation and continues in use among some Lutherans. It is intended to mean the same as "catholic", that is: including all true Christians.

In some Lutheran traditions, the creed follows the reading of the gospel (as in Divine Service I). In others it follows the sermon (as in Divine Service II). In either place, it is the congregation's response to the word of God which has been heard, indicating faith and agreement with the message of the gospel.