

(solemn church music) (ceremonious church music) (solemn church music) (church choir singing)  
(ceremonious church music)

Minister 1: Let the congregation be seated. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through Him. A cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the same loaf. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And with your spirit.

Minister 1: Let us pray. In unison, the collect for purity. Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy holy name through Christ, our Lord. Amen. And now, let the congregation rise and join the choir in the Gloria in Excelsis. ("Glory be to God on High") ♪ Glory be to God on high ♪ ♪ And on earth peace, good will toward men ♪ ♪ We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee ♪ ♪ We glorify Thee, ♪ ♪ We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory ♪ ♪ O Lord God, heavenly King ♪ ♪ God the Father Almighty ♪ ♪ O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ ♪ ♪ O Lord God, Lamb of God ♪ ♪ Son of the Father ♪ ♪ That takest away the sins of the world ♪ ♪ Have mercy upon us ♪ ♪ Thou that takest away the sins of the world ♪ ♪ Receive our prayer ♪ ♪ Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father ♪ ♪ Have mercy upon us ♪ ♪ For Thou only art holy ♪ ♪ Thou only art the Lord ♪ ♪ Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Art the most high in the glory of God the Father ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins and are in love in charity with your neighbors and intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in His holy ways, draw near with faith and take this sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession to Almighty God. Let us pray. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men, we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we, from time to time, most grievously hath committed by thought, word, and deed against Thy divine majesty. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us. Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. For Thy son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please Thee in newness of life to the honor and glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of Thy great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn to Thee. Have mercy upon us. Pardon and deliver us from all our sins. Confirm and strengthen us in all goodness and bring us to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Hear what comfortable words the scripture says to all who turn to the Lord. This saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness. Therefore, be of good courage. And now, let us pray for the whole state of Christ's church using the litany. Most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee to receive these our prayers for the universal church, that Thou will confirm it in the truth of Thy holy faith, inspire it with unity and concord, and extend and prosper it throughout the world. We beseech Thee also so to guide and strengthen the witness of the church to those in authority in all nations, that they may maintain the justice and welfare of all mankind. Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all ministers of Thy church, that both by their life and doctrine, they may set forth Thy true and lively word and faithfully administer Thy holy sacraments. And to all Thy people, give Thy heavenly grace, that with willing heart and due reverence, they may hear and receive Thy holy word, truly serving Thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives. And we most humbly beseech Thee of Thy goodness, O Lord, to support and strengthen all those who, in this transitory life, are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. We remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served Thee in Thy church on earth, who now rest from their labors, especially those most dear to us whom we name in our hearts before Thee. Keep us in fellowship with all Thy saints and bring us at length to the joy of Thy heavenly kingdom. Grant this, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only mediator and advocate. Amen.

Minister 2: Let us hear and receive the word of God for us this day, and it is found in St. Paul's epistle to Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 11. "For I receive this from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also, the cup after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and the blood of the Lord. Therefore, let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Here insert reading of the lesson for the day. Amen.

Minister 3: A little more than a year ago, a student came in to my office with a question. One which grew out of a service of worship he had attended elsewhere a few days earlier. He told me that a campus minister had presided over a service attended by about 20 students. During the service, under the heading, the words of forgiveness. This minister made the following statement: "Our sins are forgiven. All of our sins are forgiven. All of the sins of all of us are forgiven. Our sins are forgiven whether we know it or not. Our sins are forgiven whether or not we ask that they be forgiven. And even if we don't want them forgiven, they are forgiven. All we need to do to have peace of mind is to realize that they are forgiven, to know that we are accepted, and to accept our acceptance." My office visitor went on to say that as comfortable as this might make him feel, he had trouble honestly believing what the minister had said. He doubted that the forgiveness of sins could be all that simple and easy. He wanted to know why an ordained minister would make such a statement and, in short, just what the situation is with regard to the forgiveness of our sin and with regard to our being accepted. Well, because I find more people than just this one student are uncertain about that, I've decided to speak very briefly on it now. There are two lines of thought which have prompted some churchmen to make statements like the one which my student friend reported. Let's take a brief look at them. The first line of thought holds that the concept of guilt, of judgment and condemnation rests upon the assumption that there is a personal supreme being whose righteous nature is outraged by our lust, our hatred, our greed, our

prejudice, and our selfishness. And because of that outrage, he rejects us and condemns us. What we need to realize, however, is that no such almighty, divine person exists. So it is alleged. Rather, God is the ground of being. A life force which somehow runs through the universe but which falls short of being personal. The thinkers who hold to this first view contend that individuals who feel guilt-ridden, rejected, and condemned feel that way unnecessarily, and that the church should set them free by announcing that we are forgiven, all of us, and accepted because there is no all-powerful, divine person to reject us and condemn us. Well, I suppose that a man can believe what he wants to believe. And if there are thinkers who wish to believe there is no personal God, that is what they will believe. And they are certainly entitled to that belief. However, to the extent that all of us are under some kind of responsibility to use words honestly and without deception, it becomes necessary for us to call into question the announcement that our sins are forgiven and we are accepted if there is no personal God. This is the case because both the concept of forgiveness and the concept of acceptance require the action of a person. It is therefore patently dishonest to declare that an impersonal ground of being has forgiven or accepted any human person. Suppose that in the dark, I happen to mistake a fence post for a person whom I know I have wronged. If I walk up to the fence post and say, "Will you forgive me?", what response will I receive? I will, of course, receive no response whatsoever. It is true that the fence post will not reject me or condemn me, but to say that it will not reject me is not to declare that it will accept me. And to say that it is not capable of condemning me is not to establish any basis at all for a gospel of forgiveness. Forgiveness, both as a conceptual word and as an experienced reality, requires the conscious and volitional act of a personal being. You can forgive me and I can forgive you, but a fence post cannot forgive either one of us. The very most, which an ordained minister can say therefore, if he believes God to be merely an impersonal ground of being, is that we are not rejected. We are not condemned. He may not, with honesty, declare that God forgives our sins. The second line of thought which has led some churchmen to declare that the sins of all of us are forgiven is one which, unlike the first, assumes the existence and reality of a personal God. This view presents God as being a person who loves His creation in such passion that He cannot bear to see anyone of His creatures lost under any circumstances. While He would, of course, prefer that we be righteous, He actually will accept us just as we are, good, bad, or indifferent. Therefore, according to this view, He does not and He will not, He does not and He will not really condemn us or reject us. He may scold us, but He always forgives us. He may sometimes take away our goodies to try to jar us into being righteous, but He continually accepts us in any case within the fold. Therefore, say these thinkers, the church should frequently remind all men that they are accepted and forgiven by a personal God. Well, unlike the first view, the second view has the advantage, at least, of being a theoretical possibility. However, we must go beyond the theoretical possibility to the question of reliability. On what should we base our beliefs about an activity of God toward us? On our own likes and dislikes? Many have done that. During the Civil War, for instance, many southerners visualized God in a confederate uniform, and an equal number of northerners claimed to see Him in a Yankee uniform. But is our mere wish, our whim, our selfish bias a sufficient basis for concluding that God will do this or that or the other? I think not. For a very long time, the overwhelming majority of Christians have believed that the true nature of God is ascertained from reading the account of the life, the teachings, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, to know whether when and how God forgives sin. Therefore, one should consult not his own private preference, but the New Testament, as it has been interpreted by the Holy Spirit in the church through all the centuries. When we consult the New Testament, we learn about a God who loves His creations so much that He desperately wants us to be righteous and not

to destroy ourselves by inequity. A God who nevertheless sees that we have fallen victim to sin and cannot, by ourselves, escape sin's trap. His love extended to such a degree that He sent His son to proclaim for us a new chance to tell of the Father's redeeming love, to demonstrate that love in his own person, and to persuade as many as possible to accept the offered forgiveness and grace. Now, the demonstration of that proclaimed love and offered forgiveness included the spilling of His very lifeblood on an unjust cross. George Frideric Handel has celebrated that act by composing great music. For the scriptural announcement, worthy is the lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us unto God by His blood. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that God's forgiveness is forced upon us or that it comes automatically. The conditions of its coming are, on the other hand, clear and plain and universal. First, we must recognize sin to be the deceiver and destroyer, which it is. We must recognize our own involvement in it. Next, we must confess to God and before men that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that we seek deliverance from it. We must acknowledge our inability to square the accounts or to energize our own redemption. Last, we must accept freely the forgiveness and strength which God offers in and through His son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. When we do that, our sins are forgiven and we may know that they are. The way we know it is not by having a comfortable feeling in our stomach or by some other physical joy or delight. We know it on the surety of God's promise which Dean Cleland read in the opening scripture verses, that if we fulfill the conditions, He will certainly forgive us. In this way, even a man who doesn't have a comfortable feeling in his stomach, even a man whose body is wrecked by pain can know his sin's forgiven. The holy communion is a sacrament instituted by Christ to be the sign of our forgiveness and acceptance by a personal God, by our heavenly Father. We are bidden to come to His table, be His guests, accept His freely-offered food and drink which today, as on that first supper, are the symbols of His broken body and shed blood on our behalf. Amen. (church organ playing) (church organ playing) (church choir singing) ("Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow") ♪ 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 ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

Minister 1: O God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we offer and present unto Thee the gifts of Thy people, silver and gold, bread and wine, for the service of Thy kingdom and the use of the table of Thy son. Accept them, we pray Thee, for we offer them in His name and for His sake. Amen. Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up unto the Lord.

Minister 1: Let us give thanks unto the Lord. (congregation indistinct reply)

Minister 1: It is very meet, right in our bound and duty that we should, at all times and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father Almighty, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, in substance of our mortal flesh, manifested forth his glory, that he might bring us out of darkness into his own glorious light. Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying- ♪ Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts ♪ ♪ Heav'n and earth are full of Thy glory ♪ ♪ Glory be to Thee ♪ ♪ O Lord, most high ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ Let us pray. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of Thy tender mercy has given Thine only son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who made there by the one offering of himself, a full,

perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and it instituted in his holy gospel command us to continue a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again. Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech Thee and grant that we receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine according to Thy son, our savior, Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his passion, death, and resurrection, may be partakers of the divine nature through him, who in the same night that he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Likewise, after supper, he took the cup. And when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, "Drink, ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Do this as oft as you shall drink it in remembrance of me." Amen. And now, let's offer unto God, in unison, the prayer of humble access. We do not presume to come to this Thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table, but Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to partake of the sacrament of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, that we may walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in him and he in us. Amen. (gentle church music) The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee and be thankful. The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ died for thee and be thankful. (gentle church music) (gentle church music) (faint organ music)