

“The Marburg Colloquy”

A Sermon for the Family of God

Various Scriptures

Rev. Almir Pehlić

November 17, 2017

Transcriber’s Note: Accompanying Rev. Pehlić was an American pastor and missionary to Croatia, Tom Smith, who introduced Almir.

Tom: Good morning.

Men: Good morning.

Tom: You probably know that I used to be a pastor up in the Zelienople area. And then the Lord called me to go to Croatia. And so for the last five years I’ve been working with the Protestant Reformed Christian Church, which is also the Reformed Episcopal Church. And for the last two-and-a-half years I’ve been working with Almir Pehlic in the city of Karlovac, which is about 30 miles southwest of Zagreb, the capital. Three-and-a-half or four years ago, Almir started this church with almost nothing. And God has been blessing and bringing people. We’re still small by American standards. But God has been faithful. And Almir has been an incredible pastor at great sacrifice. Anyhow, he’s finished his M.Div. And along with me we both teach at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. And anyhow, when we’re not busy with seminary, we’re busy with the church in Karlovac. And I help Almir, and I am learning so much from this guy.

So he just reads. He’s a voracious reader. And he reads these really big concepts, and he explains them in little words for me. *(Laughter)* So anyhow, Almir, can you teach us? *(Applause)*

Almir: Thank you. Thank you so much. Let me just turn this thing on.

Transcriber’s Note: The microphone.

Tom: Hold it.

Almir: Thank you, brother Tom. Pastor Tom and the bishop have been working for what, two years now?

Tom: Three.

Almir: Three years straight. And I think that we don’t just have an amazing friendship, but we actually have a lot of practice with all kinds of pastoral stuff. So I’m also a pastor in the Zagreb church, the capital of Croatia since just recently, September 1. So I have a lot of things to do. But I love it because it’s all for the Lord.

I’m very glad that I can be here today, that we can learn a little bit more about what you actually started last time. You’ve learned about the Reformation, right, and what the Reformation is and how it started and why it started.

What we are going to do first is that I will ask my dear brother Don if he can please hit it.

Participant: Hit it?

Almir: Hit it, yes. And then he’ll play.

Transcriber’s Note: Don pounds the piano. *(Laughter) (Music)*

Almir: Let us pray. Oh God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace, You have asked us seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by

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our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord. And as *“there is but one body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all”*, so may we be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity. And may we with one mind and one mouth glorify Thee. In Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Almir: I usually pray in Croatian, so it’s kind of hard for me to pray in English, you know. But it’s my second language. You know, I also do poetry. I also write poetry. So if I don’t understand some words, then it’s very hard for me. So I actually prayed this a couple of times. I checked the words and what they meant, so I could pray alone for about ten minutes so I could pray with you today.

Participant: How do you say *Jesus Christ* in Croatian?

Almir: Issus Christ.

Transcriber’s Note: Pronounced *Creest*.

Participant: Issus Christ.

Almir: Yes. Issus Christ.

Okay. So basically I promised that I would be short today. But honestly, I lied. I do that a lot. (*Laughter*) My students don’t like me because of that. But I try as much as I can.

So I got this outline from last time. I was very interested about this last point that you have here, the two main issues. And I guess one was what, the works, that Catholics believe that they are saved by works, and Protestants don’t, right?

Well, but I ask what are the works that the Catholics are saved by? Can you tell me? For example, what would that be? What are the works? Does anyone here know?

Participant: Baptism.

Almir: Baptism. Okay, sure. Something else?

Participant: Sacraments.

Second Participant: The Lord’s Supper.

Almir: The Lord’s Supper. Maybe. Okay, sure. Okay.

Participant: Penance.

Almir: Okay, yes. Well done. Have you ever heard about pilgrimage? Okay. So when a Catholic actually did something really bad, what did he have to do? He had to go to some holy place, right. And they had all of these relics there like bones and clothing and stuff from these old saints that passed away maybe hundreds of years ago, you know? So what did they do there? They prayed to these bones. They kissed them, you know?

And they would probably get forgiveness of sins. Basically this was all connected to this idea of indulgences that you heard last time, right?

Okay. So this is not just oh, be good to your neighbor. No, this is not the works that they’re talking about. We are talking about religious stuff. That’s what we call it in theology—religious stuff. Okay. (*Laughter*)

Basically, today we are going to talk about Protestant unity. And that’s why I actually prayed this prayer from this amazing book. It’s called *The Book of Common Prayer*. Has

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anybody heard of *The Book of Common Prayer*? That’s great. If you didn’t, please take it and read it and pray it, because it’s going to help you with your spiritual growth.

When we talk about the Reformation, we need to actually ask ourselves what is the Reformation? You basically did that last time. But when I say the word *Reformation*, what do you think of? What is the first thing that comes to your mind? Reformation?

Participant: Revolt.

Almir: Revolt?

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Almir: Against whom?

Participant: The church.

Almir: What church?

Participant: Rome.

Almir: Rome. Against Rome, not the church. It was against Rome, okay? That’s very important to understand. Luther was never against the church. It was against what? Indulgences, against some bad things that happened in Rome in the Vatican with the Pope.

When I was a young Christian, I was a Roman Catholic because that was the only church I had in Croatia. When I was a little bit older my other church was a Baptist church, and I was a youth pastor there. Do we have any Baptists here? We don’t have any Baptists here. Pentecostals? Oh, interesting! Okay. Well,--

Participant: Normally there are.

Almir: Well Tom lied to me again. (*Laughter*) But then I read some more of the Bible and church history, so I know the more difficult things, right?

And what the biggest problem to me was—and I’m not sure if this is the right word in English, but I will say it anyway—*romanticizing*. Is that a word? Romanticizing the Reformation.

Okay. When we talk about the Reformation, we usually say, “Oh, Martin Luther! He was such a great guy!” Or Ulrich Zwingli or John Calvin. When the Reformation started, everything was so great, you know? That was an amazing time for the church!

Well today I’m going to burst your bubble, because no, it wasn’t that great. It was actually very tough for Catholics, for Zwinglians, for Lutherans, and later for Calvinists. We’re not going to talk about that today because of these Calvinists today, right? (*Laughter*)

Participant: Very good.

Almir: I know that this is a Bible study, okay? We won’t be using too much of the Bible. But I’ll give you some, just to explain some things that happened. Even though my English is not the worst in the world, I really don’t like reading out loud, especially from the Bible, because you have many archaic words which are hard for me to read. But I have this ESV Bible here which Pastor Tom gave me to use today. So I will read Matthew 25:26-29. This is basically the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper. Okay—

Participant: Do you want us to read it for you?

Almir: Thank you, brother! Yes. If you can do that, that would be great. (*Laughter*)

Participant: Matthew 25?

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Almir: That’s right, yes.

Participant: What were the verses?

Almir: 26-29.

Participant: Wait. The institution of the Lord’s Supper?

Almir: Yes.

Participant: That’s Matthew 26.

Almir: Oh, yes. I’m sorry. I turned to the wrong page.

Participant: Don, can you recite that off by heart? *(Laughter)*

Participant: Which verses?

Almir: Verses 26-29.

Participant: “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ And He took a cup. And when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you. For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’”

Almir: Thank you.

Participant: The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Almir: Luther read this same passage. Zwingli read the same passage. They all knew what they were reading. They understood it differently.

And that was the basic problem, because you probably know about *sola Scriptura*, which means only the Bible, right? And now these two great Reformers are reading only the Bible, the Bible only, right? And they actually came to very different conclusions.

So what did Luther hold to what the Lord’s Supper is? He basically said that this is the real presence, the physical presence of Jesus Christ, like a bodily presence, right?

And what did Zwingli say? It’s real absence. It’s a symbol, okay?

And now let me say that sure, it’s not such a big difference. It’s only one point in this huge event of the Reformation that changed the world. But guess what? Luther didn’t think that way. So Luther and Zwingli actually fought a lot about that. They were writing very angry letters to each other. Actually Luther did that. *(Laughter)* Zwingli was kind of more moderate. He tried to be academic and everything. But Luther was this very fierce guy. Is the word *fiercy*? It’s not. I made it up. *(Laughter)* You can use it.

So one day this thing happened that’s called *the Marburg Colloquy*. Has anyone ever heard of it?

So in the Synoptic Gospels you basically have all of these sides of the Lord’s Supper, especially if you go from the beginning to the end, where actually Christ is giving Himself on the cross, right? So that’s actually part of this symbolism of the Lord’s Supper. But what’s going on here is that even though they agreed on symbolism, they did not agree on reality.

And what happened was that there was this guy Philip Melanchthon. And if you’ve never heard of Philip Melanchthon, he was a great German, a former very good friend of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli from Switzerland, right? He called them together.

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“Look, it is time to change something. It is time to come to something called Protestant sacramental union.” (*Unclear*)

What do you think? Have you ever heard of the Diet of Speyer?

Participant: Yes.

Almir: You did? Great! What happened there? In 1536 there was this diet, like a city council. And they said that at the Diet of Worms—have you heard of that?

Participant: Yes.

Almir: At Worms Luther was actually right. But Luther was condemned as a heretic and all Protestants with him.

They said that every single Protestant or Lutheran needs to leave the land, or they need to change their religion. They need to go back to the Catholic Church.

In 1536 something happened because there were some big political problems. And this Diet of Speyer actually said that they would give the Lutherans freedom. So Lutherans could have lands. They could have stores and everything. They could be like normal citizens again.

Everything was fine until the second Diet of Speyer. What happened there? They took it all back. So Lutherans are again excommunicated not from the church, but from the society.

What’s going on? Do you know how Protestants got their name? Do you know? I guess some of you are calling yourselves Protestants. Do you know why? Because of the Diet of Speyer, the second diet.

What happened there is that these Lutheran evangelicals actually protested this decision of the second Diet of Speyer. So Protestantism actually started then. This isn’t just a Reformation anymore. These are real Protestants.

So Protestants don’t have lands anymore. They will lose everything that they have, every single civil right. So there is this guy who is very close to the politicians, the princes of this era. And he said, “We need to unite Protestants. We need to unite Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther because everyone else agrees but these two.” And these are the main guys.

And what’s going on? Philip Melanchthon says, “Okay. I am going to put them both together with some other guys at Marburg. And we are going to talk about the differences and similarities. And we are going to have unity because we need it to survive not just as Christians, but also as citizens of our land.”

So they basically started a conversation. Luther really didn’t want to come. He came to Marburg hiding. But that was okay. He came. Okay, but he lost time. He actually did a favor for Melanchthon, right? So he says, “Okay, I will come. But you know, we won’t solve anything.”

Okay, so he came. Ulrich Zwingli came. Other guys came too. What happened there? They met there from October 1 to October 4, 1539. And they were talking. There were 15 points. And they agreed on 14 of those. Everything was fine. And then the last point. (*Laughter*) The Lord’s Supper.

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Sola Scriptura. Everything is clear in the Bible, right? So they open John 6 for example. Eating flesh, right, drinking blood? Luke 24, right? (*Unclear*) Everything was fine.

But something went wrong. What is the Lord’s Supper? Luther was saying that this was the real presence. Christ is truly present. And Zwingli said, “No, this is just a symbol.”

What you need to understand is that Luther is still under the great influence of *scholasticism*, of Thomism, of Roman Catholic ideas, of the theology of the 13th and 14th centuries, right? But Zwingli is under the influence of *humanism*, of Erasmus of Rotterdam, this great humanist of the 16th century who was Catholic. He lived like a Catholic. He hated Catholics and the Catholic Church. But he always remained Catholic. He never moved toward Protestantism.

So Zwingli was basically a humanist. Luther was, let’s say, some kind of a Thomist. He was a very good theologian, but he was still into scholasticism.

At this point, there was just one more issue, and this one was Baptism. Baptism was so relatively quick. Please do not forget that in this era we already have the so-called Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptist movement started in Switzerland under Ulrich Zwingli. Actually his two students, Konrad Grebel and Felix Marx started it. And they said, “Ulrich, you didn’t go far enough. This sacrament is too Catholic. We need to change it. Why are you baptizing kids? They don’t have faith. What’s going on? Are you coming back to the Catholic Church? Or are you going to be a real reformer and do it as you should be doing it?”

They had this huge public dispute, you know. They had arguments and everything. So Ulrich Zwingli won, for example, and other guys lost. And Anabaptism was officially a heresy for the city of Zurich.

So at the Marburg Colloquy they only talked basically about the Lord’s Supper, because everything else was solid.

Okay, so what’s going on is that Luther comes from Wittenberg. He is a very good theologian, not as a Biblical scholar but as a theologian, like a systematic theologian and philosopher. He is good with a lot of the church fathers.

But Zwingli is also good with that. Zwingli has problems with Anabaptists. But Luther has problems with the *prophetic movement*. Have you heard about Thomas Munster and some other guys who actually said, “Oh, we are living in the last times; the end is near?” So they had this great battle in 1527, and they were all killed.

Andrei Carlstadt, one of the closest friends of Martin Luther, one of the professors at Wittenberg, said, “I’m not a doctor anymore.” So he took everything from his academia, his regalia, you know, and he hid himself. “I’m not a doctor. I’m not a professor.” (*Unclear*)

And Luther said, “Okay, you’re going a bit too far. You know, this is not right. This is very important.”

So he tried to talk to Carlstadt and said, “We need to go slowly. This isn’t a race.”

On the other hand, he had to deal with Philip Melancthon, who was going really, really, really slow. He actually wanted to take a lot of the liturgy and a lot of the

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vestments from the Roman Catholic church, while Carlstadt actually gave everything up. He was wearing a suit and tie. Melanchthon was like me in my church—cassock, surplis, stole, *(unclear)*

So if you think that the Reformation was a very nice period for the church, no, it wasn't. It was war, not war between Protestants and Catholics, but between Protestants. We need to be aware of that.

So when we say, “Oh, thank God for the 500th year of the Reformation!, we had this huge celebration in Croatia. It was live coverage on TV. It was great! But do you know what? It wasn't so great, because I was sitting next to some Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals. And they said, “You have no idea what you're saying. Your theology is bad.” And they're saying to me, “Oh, he's a papist!”, right?

What is going on? Where is the Protestant unity? Men, this is actually the place and time when things count. We have Anabaptists, right? And that's why today we have Baptist churches, Pentecostal churches, Amish, Mennonites and so on.

On the other hand, we have Lutherans. We have Episcopalians and Presbyterians, right? We even have some other groups like Methodists, and so on. Yeah, right. *(Laughter)* Do we have Methodists here? *(Laughter)*

The Diet of Speyer was part of this whole thing. They loved their freedom. They needed a united church, a united Protestant church.

But what do you think if I asked you how you would unite? We're not getting into the Baptists now, or Pentecostals. They're Anabaptists. But the Protestants. How are you going to unite Presbyterians, Lutherans, Anglicans, based on what? How can you do that? Is that a possibility?

Zwingli's and Melanchthon's idea was this. Let's build a church like Switzerland's is built, in cantons, like counties. And every county or canton has its own church with the same theology.

Why was that important? Because they didn't want to have a new Rome. They didn't want to have a new pope. They didn't want to have a centralized religion in one place, right? That's what they fought for, because they were afraid of a new pope, because the Pope was antichrist for the Reformers, right?

So how are they going to do it? Basically they needed to unite all of those Protestant lands around the same theology. There were fifteen points. Fourteen were agreed upon. One point was the destruction of Protestant unity, and that was the Lord's Supper. That was the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread.

This Sunday I am going to talk about talents. I'm going to have a sermon in an Anglican church and in a Presbyterian church. I am going to preach about talents. And the biggest gift, the biggest talent that God gave us is Jesus Christ—His love for us, His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, right?

Participant: Amen.

But Jesus gave us something more. He gave us the Lord's Supper. And today, when we think about the Lord's Supper, we think about something where, oh yes, we are doing it once a month. You need to be a good guy to do it. You need to be nice to your neighbors, you know?

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No! That’s not it! And both Zwingli and Luther agreed upon that. The Lord’s Supper is to be celebrated six times a year. Why is it not important? People said that it was too important to celebrate it too often.

And that’s such a weird thing, right? If it’s something very important to you, why are you going to do it just six times a year?

Participant: Now preach it, brother! (*Laughter*)

Almir: Can I get a hallelujah here? (*Laughter*) We can speak in tongues later. (*Laughter*) It is so important, really. Think about it.

John 6 was the basic point that Luther went to. He was talking about the Lord’s Supper. So if you want to have eternal life, you need to eat His flesh—*sarx*, *right?* That’s a very powerful word in Greek, *sarx*. This is flesh. It’s not *soma*, like the body. It’s *sarx*. It’s flesh, it’s muscle, it’s blood. It’s living flesh. And you need to drink blood, which is real blood.

And what happened with the Jews? You would never get followers! What happened then? They left Him. Why? Because they were forbidden to taste the blood from meat, you know, especially human meat.

Why were they so disgusted by it? Because they heard Jesus’ words. You need to eat *sarx*, flesh, drink My blood.

And the Jews back then, when they were following Jesus, realized what He was saying. And that was Luther’s point. If they left, well I guess they understood what it means because of their language and in their context.

But Zwingli said, “It’s a symbol.” He’s saying that He is the bread of life. That is His word. His word is what is important. He feeds you in His teaching.

And look, brothers. (There are no sisters here, right?) Brothers, that’s okay. Zwingli did not I would like to ask you about this interesting word. Jesus is saying, “Remember.” “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” What is remembrance? How do you remember?

I was at this Penguins game, right? What day was that?

Participant: Tuesday.

Almir: Okay. That was a great game, right? We won! I can say not, “We won,” but “I won,” right? (*Laughter*) Okay, who else won here? (*Laughter*) Raise your hand. Who won? Okay, great! Why do you say that you won. You never played.

I don’t know hockey. I really don’t know the difference. But I was there. But I won. I visited Pittsburgh. I wore a Penguins jersey. I won! (*Laughter*) I never played. And then I get this flag, you know, and it says, “Stanley Cup winners 2016 and 2017, 1992 and ’93, I guess.”

Participant: ’91 and ’92.

Second Participant: Amen, brother! (*Laughter*)

Almir: Yeah. 2018, right? But listen to me. I was not there. In 1992 I didn’t even know about the Penguins, right? Why do I say that we won? I did it in remembrance. I remember. How could I remember? I wasn’t even here! Why do I remember it? How can I remember it? I never saw the game! I remember it! Why?

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Why do I remember it? Because I’m part of the collective. I am a part of these crazy fans there, this crazy group.

They said, “Oh, this is like 1992, men.”

And I said, “Yes, it is.” (*Laughter*) And I wasn’t even there, you know?

(*Laughter*) I remember it. And he remembers it.

You see, when Jesus said, “*Do this in remembrance of Me,*” we don’t have to be there. We didn’t have to be there at the cross with Mary and with John. You don’t have to be there. But you still do remember.

Participant: Amen.

Almir: We are part of the church. The church has a collective memory. We are a collective.

The church didn’t start in the 16th century with the Marburg Colloquy or with the 95 theses, or with the translation of the Bible into German or Croatian or English. No! The church started with Jesus Christ and maybe before that, if we like our covenant theology and so on, right?

Participant: Amen.

Almir: How do we remember that? We remember because we believe.

Participant: Amen.

Almir: We remember because we are part of each other. We remember this prayer that they prayed. It’s a prayer from Ephesians 4:5. We are one body. We are one soul. And what else? Paul is saying that there is “*one baptism*” of the heart. There is one Christ, one Lord. There is “*one faith.*” There is “*one body.*”

So I basically came from Croatia here, you know? I came from Croatia, where we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. I was happy to be there and I’m happy to be here in Christ. I really don’t know you, except for Tom and maybe Don, because we have talked.

Tom: And Ted.

Almir: And Ted. That’s right, yes.

Tom: You can’t forget him.

Almir: But I don’t know you. But you know, we have the same memory.

Participant: Amen.

Almir: So Luther and Zwingli fought over the Lord’s Supper. They fought on a theological basis, on the basis of scholasticism or humanism. Zwingli did not go too far. Luther was not too wrong. But there was something there that maybe they both missed.

And today I really want to bring you from the 16th century, from 1539, to the 21st century, to 2017, right? Here, brothers, this is our model now, the Marburg Colloquy. Are we going to fight? We can discuss. But don’t forget Jesus’ words. “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” “Break the bread in remembrance of Me, in memory of Me.”

Transcriber’s Note: Almir gives the Greek equivalent.

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Almir: That’s what Passover is all about. Eating that terrible food that tastes funny! No one likes that, you know. But Jews do that because they like to remember, right? *(Laughter)*

And it is tempting, especially for me as a theologian, a systematic theologian, to go into all of this historic discussion and talk about it all. That’s good.

Guys, I’m not married. I don’t have kids. My church is everything I have. I don’t have many friends. Tom is my only friend. *(Laughter)* Yeah, you feel bad now that I told you that, right? *(Laughter)*

No, but what I’m trying to say here is this. Let’s make this our model, okay? And let’s open this discussion now. What would you like to change in Protestantism today if you had the chance? If you had the chance to change something, what would you like to change? Do you have any idea? What would you like to change, maybe in your own congregation, maybe in your own theology?

I’m not talking about baptism. If we have Baptists here, they’re not Protestants. They’re Anabaptists. That’s their theology. Their theology is Anabaptist theology. It’s not Lutheran theology. It’s not Calvinist theology. It’s Anabaptist theology. It’s the theology of the Brethren, right? Or the Mennonites, if you’re going back to 1809 and the merger of the Separatists and the Mennonites. Okay, what would you like to change?

Okay, I have this problem. When I serve the Eucharist,--I call it the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread, the Lord’s Supper,--I have this amazing prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer*, this amazing invitation that says, “*Whoever is baptized, whoever truly believes in our Lord may come forward and take Communion.*”

But look at this. I think it was last year that I was in the Netherlands at this big conference, a Reformed conference, right? And they were talking about something that I never actually heard about. I may have heard about it but I never thought about it. It’s called *fencing the table*. Have you heard of fencing the table? I thought it was like sword fighting or something.

Fencing the table? It’s forbidding those who are outside of the local congregation, or those you know who are part of some heretical organization from receiving the Lord’s Supper. But you know, what did Jesus do? Huh? Come on! Judas was there!

Participant: Yep.

Almir: He knows Judas; He knows our hearts! I know that we have pastors here. I know that we have theologians here. Are you going to say no to me to partake of the Eucharist in your church. I’m not perfect enough? Of course I’m not worthy! You are not, either!

Participant: Amen.

Almir: But sure, brother. Yes?

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Participant: I understand what you’re saying. My church fences it and says that anyone who is part of a Bible believing church may partake. But what do you do with 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul says that we’re to examine ourselves?

Almir: To examine ourselves, that’s right. We always need to be aware of what we are doing and how to recognize the body, because if we’re not recognizing the body, we’re not taking the instruction of self. Of course. Yes, sir?

Participant: Actually, it’s a gracious, loving thing, because the persons can bring condemnation on themselves, as Scripture says—

Almir: Sure. But we need to examine ourselves! What does Paul say? If our conscience is clear, right?

Participant: I just—

Almir: Sure, yes.

Participant: If you are truly a pastor or a shepherd of the flock,—

Almir: Yes.

Participant: Your care for those individuals is such that you should actually be concerned about who they are. To the point where it’s done properly, this is basically a loving ministerial action.

Almir: It is. That’s not the context. You are talking about the local congregation. We are talking about Protestant unity. That’s the topic here. So if I from another church come to your church, that’s the thing. I’m not talking about discipline in the church. That’s something else. That’s another thing. And of course I’m doing that.

Participant: Most people who are Reformed who fence the table are not doing it necessarily for the local congregation. They’re doing it from the fact that a person needs to have a truly saving faith.

Almir: Amen. I agree. So we are back at Marburg here. Luther was right. Zwingli was right. What happened? Huh?

Participant: They split.

Almir: They split! What’s happening today? We have the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican church, and of course the Baptists and Pentecostals and all of them.

What’s going on, then?

Participants: We have splits within those.

Almir: We have splits within those because we are better than those. I’m not here to tell you anything new. I’m just trying to give us hope. Things can change. We can change. I’m not better than you guys. I wear this clerical collar, right? Jesus knew who was at the Last Supper.

Can you open to Acts 27, please? This is our final reading for today. Can someone read me this? Please read Acts 27:33-38? Who can read that?

Participant: I’ll read it.

Almir: Thank you.

Participant: *“As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and*

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without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength. For not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.’ And when he had said these things, he took bread. And giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. We were in all 276 persons in the ship. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.”

Almir: Okay, that’s it. Thank you. Did you hear that? I know. Oh, that’s not the Lord’s Supper! Did you hear the rest of it? You can see the image of Christ at the Last Supper there. Damnation is near, right, as it was with the apostles and with Jesus Himself. Damnation is near. The ship is basically a wreck. Everybody is going to die.

And what is Paul doing? He’s taking bread. He’s giving what? *Eucharistia*. Thanks, thanksgiving. *Eucharistia* in Greek means thanksgiving. And that’s why we have the word *Eucharist*, right? He breaks the bread.

He gives it to them. And what’s going on? They are encouraged! We never see that these people are better! They weren’t all Presbyterians, or they weren’t all Lutherans, or all Baptists or Mennonites. They were all in Christ. I’m not talking about some official greeting here. I’m talking about unity in important things. They had 14 points. And this one point destroyed the Protestant church.

We don’t have unity today. I cannot come, maybe, to an ELCA—an Evangelical Lutheran church—to preach. I can’t come to some churches because I’m an ACNA.

Transcriber’s Note: Anglican Church of North America.

Almir: Why are we doing all that? So basically, let’s be honest. I say that this side is wrong. The Reformation was not a romantic thing. And today we have problems because of that. It was a great idea, but the execution was very poor.

But there is good news. The Holy Spirit is still active. He’s still working everything out. And He can change things. We can change things. We can love each other. As *The Book of Common Prayer* says,—and I know I’m promoting my Anglican faith, but that’s okay!—“*Everyone who truly loves the Lord, who truly needs encouragement, who needs hope, let him come.*”

Brothers, I would like to pray. And I will pray in Croatian. But before that we have a question. Sure.

Participant: I hear what you’re saying, and it’s beautiful. I don’t understand why you just don’t look at John 1. “*The Word became flesh.*”

Almir: Yes.

Participant: It’s the Word that we’re eating. He became flesh.

Almir: Yes!

Participant: It’s as simple as that.

Almir: Yes. True! It’s the Incarnation, yes. Amen. “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*”, says the writer. Yes, I agree. Sure, brother.

Participant: I love what you’re saying here, because I did a little study on what Christ said about unity.

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Almir: John 17, right?

Participant: It’s pretty serious. It’s not just that, but that’s the core of it. But we’re supposed to be unified. Instead, the Protestant church is all splintered up. And one church won’t cooperate with another church. We can agree on the basics of Christian doctrine—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed. Why can’t we work together? Christ was very serious about that. He said, “The world will judge whether You have sent Me” by our unity and love for each other.” We are all splintered up.

Almir: But you’re saying that the world is judging Christ through us, through our unity. That’s what you’re saying. Is that right? Is that what you said? Okay.

Participant: What Don is talking about is the truth of the gospel.

Almir: Yes.

Participant: And because we’re not unified, the world mocks us and says, “Well, who is this Christ? You guys can’t even agree on anything.”

Almir: That’s right. I will tell you one story. It’s a short story. It is about my father. My father was a Muslim. So I began reading the Bible and everything, you know. I became a Christian. I was all on fire for Christ, and everything. And I spoke to my father about Jesus-- who he was, you know,--trying to tell him the good news, how Jesus is good, how He’s faithful.

And he said, “Yeah. You know what? I’ll become a Christian when every church will unite, because I really don’t know which one to choose.” And basically, he’s right. How can he know? He’s not a theologian. How can he do that?

But basically my father read a lot of the Bible just to spite me and to show me that he could be a theologian, too. Then he converted and he believed in Christ. He basically surrendered his life to Christ. (*Unclear*) And the bishop of my church actually came and baptized him, so that was amazing. He was crying all the time because of the liturgy of the service.

Look. People are going to get saved no matter what, because God is faithful.

Participant: Amen.

Almir: But come on, people. We are called to be one. And I know that we all love our churches and we all love our denominations. I love mine. I’m delighted to be a part of it. I love the liturgy. I love every single part of the liturgy. I love it because it’s so deep and it’s so humbling. But guys, it’s not just about that. It’s about you and me together.

So let’s have our Marburg Colloquy these next 500 years because it didn’t succeed in the first 500 years. Let’s start it now. You guys in America, you’re a huge force and you can do it here. Of course, maybe not 100%, but at least you can try.

And that’s what someone said. That’s what John 17 is all about. What did Jesus say? He wants us all to be one, so the world can believe. Okay. Do we have some more questions, because I’m looking at the clock and I need to stop now. Yes, brother Don?

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Don: This is a hard question to ask. But when we’re talking about unity, how far do we go? I mean a lot of reasons for splits, unpleasant as they may be, are because some churches are believed to have become apostate. In other words, they deny the essentials of the faith, they deny Biblical teaching. What do we do about that? I know there are individuals in those kinds of churches who are saved. Your own denomination, the Reformed Anglicans, came about as a result of a split, or the PCA, or whatever.

Almir: Yes. So what do we have to do about it?

Don: Yes. What do we do?

Almir: What do you think we should do?

Participant: Would you be willing to remove the word *Protestant*?

Almir: Well,--

Participant: And become a Christian?

Almir: Would you like to remove the word *Christian* and become a follower of the Way? Because that is how Paul actually describes himself in Acts.

Participant: Amen.

Almir: *Christian* was a pejorative?

Participant: Pejorative.

Almir: That was at Antioch, right?

Participant: I was a Catholic all my life. And I was asked by my pastor. And as the head of his church, he asked, “Well how does it feel now to be a Protestant?”

And I said, “Well I’m sorry. I’m not a Catholic, but I’m not a Protestant, because there’s as much arguing going on in the Catholic Church as there is in the Protestant Church. I’m in Christ. So what do you want to talk about now?”

Almir: Yes. That’s an amazing question. But there’s another point in the Reformation. I’m not sure that you touched on it last time—the difference between the *visible* and *invisible church*. The visible church was the argument of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and so on. And there was the Anabaptist idea of the visible church. It’s not what we’re saying today about the visible and invisible church. But basically some Anabaptists said that there is no church anymore. The church is only invisible.

So that’s a little about that. It’s too big of a topic to go into now. Maybe we can talk about it afterwards, if someone wants to talk about it. I would like to discuss that. I’m not actually the teacher here. I’m not really your teacher. You can listen to me or you can leave. (*Laughter*)

No, really. I’m not saying anything that you need to follow. These are my opinions based on what I read, what I’m teaching, what I’m preaching.

As Jesus prayed, I pray. If any of you actually pray from *The Book of Common Prayer*, or maybe *The Book of Common Worship*,--it’s there, too—pray for unity. There’s always a prayer for unity. Every day there is a prayer for unity. Every single day I pray a prayer in the evening and morning, every single day two times.

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And how can I not preach about it, then? It’s in my head. It’s in my heart. Okay, so do we have some more questions? Are we going to close? Yes?

Participant: Christ gave us the answer. When He gave us Communion, the Eucharist, He said, “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*” What’s Me? The finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That’s everything. There’s your focus.

Almir: Yes, sure. The cross.

Participant: That’s evangelism in action.

Almir: Amen, amen, amen!

Participant: Because when He said, “*Go into the whole world and preach the gospel*”, that’s the good news. That’s Christ and His finished work.

Almir: That’s right.

Participant: I’ve been baptized. And we can discuss that.

Almir: Sure, sure.

Participant: It’s all Him. “*Do this in remembrance of Me.*”

Almir: It’s all by grace.

Participant: There’s something else I want to bring in. It’s not Christ plus me. It’s all Christ.

Almir: Amen. Sure. Brother Don?

Don: Almir, what can we pray for regarding your church, the spiritual situation in Croatia, etc.?

Almir: We had some very troubling months this year. It was very painful for me as a pastor to see some of the people leave the church because of some personal things they had against each other. So you can pray for that. You can also pray for the fundraising project that we are doing here in the U.S.

Don: Okay.

Almir: So if you want to know more about it, you can find it there on the table over there and read it.

Thank you so much for listening to me. I will pray now in Croatian and I will give the benediction, if that’s okay. Let us pray.

Transcriber’s Note: Almir prays in Croatian.

Almir: Amen.

Men: Amen.

Almir: Thank you so much.

Men: Thank you. (*Applause*)