

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Let us Kneel Before the LORD”

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“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (Psalm 95:6).

Posture effects attitude. In 8th grade confirmation, I don't let the kids cradle their heads in their hands. They have to sit up. Better posture improves their alertness and attentiveness.

Posture effects attitude. In premarital counseling I encourage couples to pay attention to their postures while talking through disagreements. It probably won't help to lean into your spouse's personal space with your hands on your hips.

Posture effects performance. At the seminary we had a little tennis team that played competitively with other small colleges. Our coach (Professor Voelz) insisted we never put our discouragement on display while playing. Don't hang your heads between points. First, it informs your opponent you might be ready to give up and all they need to do is just keep the pressure on. Second, it erodes your own play and effort and confidence.

Also, before our God, posture effects attitude. As kids at the dinner table, many of us were told, “bow your heads, fold your hands, and close your eyes.” It would probably be good for us to do that as adults too, instead of chewing on our gum and looking around.

As we carry ourselves in the world, there's really no cause for a posture of arrogance and smugness. Psalm 51, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (v. 3). You will never find as much sin in another as you find in yourself. If you see a great deal in another, you only see them for a time. But when you look at yourself, you see your whole life, also the sin that no one knows about. So, before the Lord there's no strutting or prancing. Though there are inequalities in the world between people in terms of wealth and privileges and gifts, this does not make us unequal before our God. So there's really no room for swagger in the Christian's life, just humility, gratitude and praise.

In the Bible, kneeling is an important part of worship. Our text says, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD, our maker!” It's an outward sign of an inward condition: humility, supplication, gratitude. Of course, one can have the humility and the gratitude without the kneeling, but the posture of kneeling promotes that proper attitude before God.

It's not that God needs us to kneel, but we need to remind ourselves that we are His creatures, utterly dependent on Him. Imagine, our God created the stars that are billions of light years away. Kneeling helps us to keep perspective on just how small we are before the infinite love of God who made us and loves us down to the last hair on our heads.

You have noticed the new kneelers. This is the first weekend of their use. From the onset, I want to be clear. It is not necessary to kneel in order to receive Holy Communion. It's not the posture of the body, but the attitude of the soul, that is important while receiving the Lord's Supper. If the heart is attuned rightly, you can receive the Lord's Suppers standing up, sitting down, or lying in the hospital bed. Some of you should not use these kneelers. It wouldn't be safe, and that's ok.

Sometimes kneeling isn't safe in other ways. In the book of Daniel, King Darius established an ordinance that whoever prays to any god other than him, Darius, shall be cast into the den of lions. Daniel knew about the law and felt it his duty to defy that law. He opened his windows, got down on his knees three times a day and gave thanks to the Lord.

Of course, Daniel was ratted out and thrown into the lion's den. But God shut the lion's mouths. They took no interest in him. I suspect to the lions Daniel looked like one big zucchini. The next day, those who had snitched on Daniel were not so fortunate, for when the king had them thrown into the den, there ensued a veritable feeding frenzy.

Then, of course, there's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who refused to get down on bended knee before the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They too were thrown into the blazing furnace. The Lord spared them too. Remember how Nebuchadnezzar, peeking into the furnace, asked, “Did we not cast three men into the fire? Why do I see four men walking around in there unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” They opened the door and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked out without so much as a hair of their beards having been singed.”

Sometimes, the Lord does not spare the lives of those who are faithful to Him. Instead, he brings them home at the hand of their persecutors. Remember those 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians (construction workers) taken captive in Libya in 2015. Because of their Christian faith, they were lined up along the beach in orange prison suits, were forced to kneel, and then beheaded. Had they renounced their faith they might still be alive, but they did not. They were faithful to the end and remain an example for the rest of us.

We look around our society today, and it seems so many are not faithful to the end. They are drifting away from the Christian faith and life and kneeling before idols. It's discouraging; who will be left? Remember how Elijah complained to

God. "I have been very zealous for the LORD, but the Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." Yet God always preserves a remnant of the faithful. He tells Elijah, "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18). The Lord always preserves a remnant from bowing down to other gods. Not even the gates of hell will prevail against God's faithful people.

In the Bible, kneeling is what people do in the presence of God. So, "when the wisemen saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him" (Mt. 2:10).

Later, many ran up to Jesus kneeling before him, begging for healing for themselves or someone else. Even demons knelt before Jesus. In Mark 5, there was that man who lived among the tombs and was tormented by demons. No one had the strength to control or contain him. Yet, "when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him."

The usual posture for prayer was standing. Kneeling to pray was a posture assumed at emotional times. So, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knelt as He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk. 22:41).

In Acts 21 Luke describes a lovely moment. Paul and his companions had spent seven days with Christians in the city of Tyre. Verse 5, when it was time to depart "they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home."

Kneeling, we adjoin ourselves to the practice of God's people throughout the millennia. If, like me, you sometimes fall asleep while praying, you might try the traditional postures of standing or kneeling. Posture affects performance there too.

Sometimes kneeling doesn't always show humility before God. In Mark 15, a whole company of soldiers put a purple robe on Jesus and twisted together a crown of thorns and pressed it on him. And they called out, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. *They knelt before him* and mocked him.

Still, Jesus did what he came to do. He died on the cross as our redeemer. Also for when our hearts have knelt down before idols made of wood, leather, metal, precious stones, all the things we buy that thrill our hearts in ways that should be reserved only for Jesus.

What does the Lord do? He delights to give us His body and blood. Traditionally, we kneel to receive it. In Hebrew, the word for kneeling shares the same root as that for "blessing", which suggests that blessings are received here in the kneeling posture. They surely are. It's all gift. If we could do something to earn it, we wouldn't kneel to receive it.

Posture affects attitude. We cannot be truly humble until we know His salvation lies utterly beyond our own powers, our own wisdom and accomplishments, or own efforts and works. Salvation depends absolutely on the pleasure, the will and the work of Jesus Christ. That's why we kneel before the Lord our Maker to receive His gifts.

We kneel in humility because only those who are sick require the doctor (Mt. 9:12). We kneel in humility because only the sheep that is lost is looked for (Lk. 15:4). We kneel because only the captive is freed (Lk. 4:18), only the poor man is made rich, only the weak man is made strong; only the humble man is exalted (Lk. 1:52). We kneel in humility here at the Lord's altar, (if not in body, then in spirit), because only what is empty can be filled.

We kneel to receive His body and blood. The simple act of receiving Holy Communion confesses Him to be Your Lord and Savior. 1 Corinthians 11, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26).

". . . until he comes". That is, the Lord's Supper not only looks back to the cross, but forward to His return, to the last day, when every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2).

Every knee shall bow at His name. We don't see that yet. We see many bowing to other names, other gods, other idols. But the promise is on the Last Day every knee will bow. We will bend our knees in faith and gratitude, as we have been doing. Those who are not His people, will also get on bended knee, but not in faith. They will only be acknowledging what they can no longer deny: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2).

Until then? "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep under his care." Amen.