

### **“Why Are There So Few Summer Festivals?”**

***“Yahweh, I love the habitation of your house, the place where your glory dwells.” (Psalm 26:8, World English Bible)***

The summer season, especially in the Upper Midwest, is a time when many parties and gatherings are held. The reasons for this are obvious. Yet, in the life of the church, these months with warmer weather seem to have fewer special celebrations. And this is because the Church Year is divided into halves – the Festival Half and the Non-Festival Half. We are currently in the Non-Festival Half. And the obvious reason why we name these two parts of the Church Year as we do is because most of the major feasts, celebrations, and seasons throughout the Church Year exist in the first half of the Church Year. For the first half of the Church Year focuses upon the earthly life and work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. So, there is much to celebrate the first half of the Church Year.

As you’re probably aware, the following seasons listed are associated with the life and ministry of Jesus: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter & Ascension (and this list doesn’t of course include all the individual observances and holy days celebrated within this Festival Half of the Church Year). And some of these celebrations are even recognized and observed by our secular culture as well (especially Christmas and Easter).

But after Pentecost Sunday and Trinity Sunday, the “party” seems to be over in the church. Oh, the occasional remembrance of a significant person from the Bible may be observed (especially if the annual day recognizing that individual happens to fall on a Sunday). And if a congregation in our part of the world should celebrate an annual picnic or a parish anniversary, it’s likely that it will take place during the months when the weather is warmer. But these localized celebrations are individual and special events in the life of a particular congregation - not festivals on the liturgical calendar that are celebrated by the entire church. Similarly, many Christian weddings also take place in the summer. But like annual picnics or congregational anniversary celebrations, a wedding is also a parochial event and not a set festival on Christendom’s liturgical calendar. And while Independence Day may receive some lip service in the church and Thanksgiving Day often is celebrated by Christians, yet these observances technically are national holidays and not festivals in the historic Christian church calendar (and therefore they are understandably not given much consideration by non-American Christians).

And I'm aware that during the Non-Festival Half of the Church Year that Lutherans celebrate festivals like St. Michael and All Angels (September 29<sup>th</sup>), Reformation Day (October 31<sup>st</sup>), and All Saints' Day (November 1<sup>st</sup>). Yet, the fact remains that there are fewer festivals in the second half of the Church Year. See, the Non-Festival Half of the Church Year truly is less festive and even less decorative. More pageantry occurs in the first half of the Church Year. The second half of the Church Year, though, is no less significant. For Jesus is at the center of worship every Sunday. His Law and His Gospel are preached and taught every week. God's forgiveness is freely offered to sinners through His Holy Absolution and His Holy Supper all year long. For God is mightily and miraculously at work among His people in both halves of the Church Year.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the liturgical calendar adds focus and flavor to our worship life. But whether a given month of the year celebrates many festivities or few, the Triune Lord is the One we worship and His message to a dying world remains changeless. The first half of the Church Year provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect upon the saving life and work of God's Messiah. And the second half of the Church Year provides a wonderful opportunity for believers to reflect upon their daily walk of faith in this world as they look forward to Jesus' final coming on the Last Day and the subsequent everlasting resurrection life that He has prepared for them (which is why the final couple Sundays of the Church Year appropriately focus upon the topics of the Second Coming, the Day of Judgment, and the promise of life with God in Heaven). For Christ crucified and risen is the message we proclaim every week of the year as well as the God whom we worship all our lives. For Christianity is grounded in the Christ.

So, whether it be Christmas Day or Good Friday afternoon or a bright and warm Sunday morning in July, it's always fitting to pray with the psalmist: ***"Yahweh, I love the habitation of your house, the place where your glory dwells."*** For our Triune God is with His church continually in His Word and Sacraments. He offers the gifts earned for us at the cross each time we gather in His name for worship. So, be it during the Festival Half or the Non-Festival Half of the Church Year, I look forward to seeing you at worship every Sunday.

In Christ,  
Pastor