

March 28, 2024 - Maundy Thursday
Rev. Lisa Schrott
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
The Gift of Remembering

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, 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 the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

My first year in seminary I took a class on worship – learning about historical and contemporary worship practices, about prayers and music, and the sacraments. The best part of the class were the labs where we practiced elements of the service. My lab group practiced baptism on a talking Bart Simpson doll, which I think prepared us for just about anything we'd face in the church.

In the communion lab, I remember how nervous we all were— trying to get the words exactly right, while not spilling juice. When one of my classmates was struggling, I remember Kim Long, the professor of the class, stopping my classmate and saying... "When you get nervous, just think to yourself that you know this story --- you remember it don't you – you remember that on a night long ago, a night when Jesus' life was turned upside down, a night when Jesus was sitting with friends around a table and he took bread and he gave thanks to God – you can imagine what he gave thanks for – for the splendor of creation, for the acts of liberation of those oppressed, for the gifts of friends and family- and then Jesus broke the bread and he gave it to his friends and told them it was a gift – a gift of himself – his body given for them."

Kim continued that this story is our story and when we come to the table we embody – we enact this story again. And she encouraged us not to be nervous, but to remember the story – even if we don't get every word exactly right. I often think of that class when I am leading worship and trying to get all of the "mechanics" of communion right, as we will tonight. And I think of it when I read this passage from the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth.

I can see Paul gathered with a group of the church leaders telling them the story of that night again. Except Paul was a little less pastoral than my professor, and a little more pointed in his comments. Even though Paul or another apostle had told the Corinthians about the Last Supper, somehow as the years went by the church had lost its way. It had forgotten the meaning of the meal. And Paul was frustrated. For the church in Corinth was a bit of mess. Well, maybe more than a bit of a mess. You see the Lord's Supper occurred during the

course of a larger gathering and common meal of the Corinthian community. It appears that the practice had gotten out of hand. The people who arrived early for the meal were of a higher social status, and brought with them great quantities of food and drink. They ate and drank with abandon before everyone else arrived. Those who came later were the servants and those of lesser means, who often had very little to bring with them to contribute to the feast. They found little food and drink left by those who had come earlier.

Paul was not pleased by the behavior of the upper-class guests, and in the verses preceding what I read, he harshly condemned them and their selfishness. There are other places in his letters where he was critical of the divisions in the Corinthian church, but it was in the context of the Lord's Supper where his criticism of the class struggles was most profound. As one commentator noted, Paul found it a sin against the body of Christ and a celebration unworthy of the tradition. The mistreatment of members of the community injured the church and "violated the very body of Christ being remembered."¹

The very body of Christ being remembered. A gift given to us. So Paul shares again the story of that night in Jerusalem – and while the Corinthians may not have been physically present that night in the upper room – he reminds them that every time they eat this bread and drink from this cup they proclaim God's saving love in Christ Jesus. And they remember Christ. They remember not the facts of Christ's life, rather the gift of becoming re-membered. They – and we – become members of Christ's body - the church here on earth. No better gift can be imagined.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper –in the rituals and traditions we enact - we connect our individual story to the bigger Christian story and we pass our knowledge of being known and loved from one generation to the next. Jesus instructs that his actions at the Last Supper be reenacted "in remembrance" of him. He utters these words on what is to be perpetually "a day of remembrance" for the people of Israel – a time when they gathered to share the Passover meal.² So for the gathered disciples this was a time and space to remember all that God had done in their lives and the lives of their ancestors.

Scripture witnesses the importance and power of memories in our faith history. Throughout the Old Testament the Israelites remember God's covenant to Noah, to Abraham and to David. They remember their deliverance from slavery and they remember Zion when exiled in Babylon. In the New Testament biblical mandates of remembering are woven into the fabric of the lives of the disciples and the early church.

¹ Gary B. Reiersen. Holy Thursday. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. *Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*. Westminster John Knox.; 2010.

² Philip E. Thompson. Holy Thursday. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. *Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*. Westminster John Knox.; 2010.

Jesus said: Do this in remembrance of me. We eat the bread remembering the ways we have been filled by the body of Christ. The healing presence of meal delivered during a difficult time in our life. The joy of making a new friend over muffins and fruit during Sunday morning coffee hour. The sharing of sweet memories and the peals of laughter amidst the grief during a reception following a memorial service. We remember the ways this feeding around the table has led us to feed others.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” We drink this cup - the new covenant sealed in Christ’s blood for the forgiveness of sins. We remember all of the times we have been estranged from God and from each other. The times we have betrayed Christ’s call in our lives. We remember the pain that the estrangement has caused. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were betraying Christ, not by literally handing over Jesus to the authorities. Rather they were betraying Christ by denying access to the full Table.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that coming to the Table is accepting the invitation to break down the barriers that divide us. For the Corinthians it was barriers of class and economic status that they erected to prevent all from feasting at the table. Others have erected barriers based on race or ethnicity. And for others it was divorce or who someone loves or their gender identity or their politics. Failing to have the table fully open to all is betraying Christ.

The Corinthians needed Paul to tell the story again of that night – that night that Jesus was betrayed and that night that Jesus invited them all – even the ones who betrayed him - to feast on his love. For the church in Corinth, and us Christians today, to remember Jesus is to claim the consequences of his death and resurrection as a call on our lives to be members of the body of Christ. This calls us to hard places, to live lives which honor the sacrifice promised that night. And it is hard work, because it opens us to a full range of emotions and a full table of people. And yet, this gift of remembering is a continual process glimpsing God’s grace amidst the realities of life.

In her book *Take This Bread: The Spiritual Memoir of a 21st Century Christian* Sara Miles says it this way following her conversion to Christianity after taking communion one Sunday in an Episcopal church in San Francisco, “I was not going to get to sit by myself and think loftily about how much Jesus loved me in particular. I was not going to have dinner, eternally, with people just like me. I was going to get communion, whether I wanted to or not, with people I didn’t necessarily like. People I didn’t choose, but the people God chose for me.”³

The people God chose for me. What a beautiful gift to receive! The gift of dining around the table with the people God chose for me. The gift to serve, and be served, by the people God chose for me. Let us celebrate this gift, even as we recognize the ways we have failed to always accept it.

³ Sara Miles. *Take This Bread: The Spiritual Memoir of a 21st Century Christian*. Ballantine Books; 2007. p97.