

“Remembrance”

May 4, 2008

Scripture:

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9 NLT)

²⁴... do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Cor 11:24c NLT)

A few weeks after Joan and I got married we were visiting some friends in Burlington, Vt. While we were there, the big news was a new kitten they had just gotten. On the way back home I mentioned to Joan that we should get a pet too. She had never had a pet as a kid and didn't know if she wanted to have one. A couple of weeks later we bought a little kitten and we've had at least one cat in our home ever since.

One cat we had was named Sam. He was a cross between a Siamese and something else. This was the most cross-eyed cat I have ever seen. You never knew which way he was looking, but he was the best hunter we ever had.

Sam used to like to sit under a tree where we had a bird feeder. One day we were sitting outside, Sam was under the tree. A bird was in another tree about fifty feet away looking at the feeder and the cat. It was obvious the bird wanted to get to the feeder; but not with a cat sitting under it. So the bird flew out of the tree he was sitting on and landed about ten feet in front of Sam. Sam headed toward the bird. When Sam was about to close in, the bird flew another ten feet toward the tree he had been sitting in. This continued until Sam was just about to the tree. The bird flew up to a low branch; Sam started up the tree. The bird went a little higher, and Sam followed him. By this time Sam was about twenty feet up into the tree. You could just see a smile on the bird's face as he flew to the cat less bird feeder. Sam, the cat, had been treed by a bird.

I got a phone call one day at work. Sam had been hit by a car.

Whenever we let someone or something like a pet into our lives, a degree of bonding takes place. And even though death is the ending of a life, the relationship continues. We can still think about that person, we can still have a relationship through our memories. Most of us have remembrances of those who have affected our lives in some way, and even though they may not be around anymore, we can still continue that relationship from our memories.

Somebody once said the Old Testament is kind of a theology of remembering. God would call His people to build alters out of stones so they would “remember.” The Passover meal, The Seder Meal, has been repeated over the millennia to remind the Jewish people of how God freed them from oppression and slavery in Egypt.

The first scripture reading today is known as the Shema and has become the Jewish confession of faith just as the Apostle and Nicene Creeds are our Christian confessions of faith.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he referenced this scripture in the Shema:

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut 6:4-5 NIV)

God instructed His people to follow His commandments and remember them. He directed His people to:

⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut 6:7-9 NIV)

Remember, remember, remember ... And in the Bible, “remembering” is more than just recalling information. In the Bible, when you remember something, if you do it right, what was real in the past, becomes real one more time, right here right now and you are changed by it. That’s what it means to remember.

There were two practices that were central to the early church as described in the Book of Acts. The early church was so devoted to these two practices that they called them “sacraments.” The idea of a sacrament is that it is something ordinary, but God uses it to make it a vehicle for what is extraordinary. Those two sacraments were Baptism and Communion. In Baptism we use ordinary water, but something sacred is going on in Baptism. We’re going to observe one of these sacraments today — the sacrament of Communion. In Communion, at the Lord’s Table, we use the bread and the cup, ordinary elements, but something sacred happens there. Something ordinary becomes a kind of window that you can look through ... kind of a display to point us toward God.

Jesus gave His followers these two practices—these two sacraments—and they are unique. Of everything the church does, they are unique because they are practices that were initiated by

Jesus Himself. He engaged in them, and then He commands us to practice them. His followers have now observed them for 2000 years ... on every continent, in every culture, in every country.

These sacraments were not casual observances for the early church. People were baptized, people received communion. These were public acts, and they did it knowing that it would put them under a stigma. Initially, what this often meant for followers of Jesus was that they could be expelled from the synagogue, from the community of worship in which they had grown up. Sometimes they would lose their jobs; sometimes they would go to prison; sometimes they would lose their lives.

For two thousand years, Christians have practiced these sacraments at great cost.

The first sacrament, Baptism, is a one-time event. It's a way of declaring publicly that the person being baptized is now welcome in the community of faith. Based on the grace and the love of God, they are part of us.

The other sacrament that Jesus instituted for His followers, and that the early church was devoted to, is the practice of observing the Lord's Supper, or Communion. Sometimes, in our day, because we can all go on auto-pilot at times, communion will take place and people might be thinking about what groceries to buy or stuff they got to get done at work, all kinds of stuff. You should know that to the early church this was not a casual practice. The writers of the Scriptures took Communion very seriously. In fact, when Paul was writing to the church at Corinth, he said:

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:27 NIV)

The reason they took it so seriously is because of what it signifies. Because of what Jesus said – I want you to remember. Because of what it cost Him.

Different traditions have varying understandings about Communion. In the Methodist tradition to communion, the focus is usually on our remembering. It is something we do just to remember. That part certainly is true, but we would also say that Communion is not just what we do. It is fundamentally about what God is doing. Jesus, who is always present—at all times and in all places—is present in a special way when we come to the Table. It expresses what happened just before He went to the cross. It's a remembrance of the Passover meal, where He gathered His

disciples together in a small room, and they had dinner together. A meal that would change the world forever.

It's an interesting thing. In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, I Corinthians 10, he refers to communion as the Lord's Table. But that phrase is kind of striking, because in Jesus' day, who you had dinner with, whose table you got invited to, who you invited to your table, that was a big deal. And Jesus got into a lot of trouble because of some of the tables that He went to. Because He ate with the wrong kind of people. Jesus was a poor man, He never had a home, He never had a table. He always went to a meal as a guest, never the host, except, as so far as we know, for one time; when He said to His friends that they would share a Passover meal together and He had to borrow a room, He had to borrow a table, and He said to His friends:

I have eagerly looked forward to eating this Passover dinner with you. (Luke 22:14 NIV)

Because this, as far as we know, was the only time He was the host. And what He offered at His table, and offers still, is all that He had, which is Himself. This is the Lord's Table and He still invites some pretty questionable characters to it, like me. He gathers His friends and He takes a piece of bread and He breaks it, and He says to them:

I want you to do this and eat this bread on a regular basis, and, as you do, I want to ask you to remember; My body broken for you, My hands nailed to a cross, My side pierced by a sword, My head torn by a crown of thorns. Would you remember?

And then He took a cup of wine, and He said to His friends who He loved so much:

I want you to drink this cup from now on, on a regular basis, and every time you do I want you to remember it is My blood poured out for you – for you – for you. I died for you - I died so you could live.

He said:

Do this in remembrance of me. (Luke 22: 19 NIV)

As John Wesley said:

“... this command was given by our Lord when he was just laying down his life for our sakes. They are, therefore, as it were, his dying words to all his followers.”

(John Wesley *“The Duty Of Constant Communion”* Sermon 101 – 1787)

Now I imagine the disciples thinking “Jesus, do you ever think we could forget you?” But of course, that’s exactly our problem. I forget Jesus all the time, I forget Him all the time. I feel burdened by my guilt walking through a day and I need to remember. I forget that I’m called to be a servant and then I need to remember. I forget that I’m part of a family, I feel so alone and I need to remember. I forget Jesus all the time, and remembering is this powerful exercise.

Remembering is why we build monuments and memorials and why we take videos and pictures and fill up scrapbooks. But in the Bible, remembering is something special.

When you remember something, if you do it right, what was real in the past, becomes real one more time, right here, right now and your changed by it. That’s what it means to remember.

I once saw a movie about a family who was celebrating their parents’ anniversary. This was a special occasion, because their parents were celebrating 65 years of marriage. During the movie there were flashbacks of their lives together; when they started dating, their early marriage before kids, having and bringing up their kids, some rough times and some good times.

And what did the anniversary couple want at this event? Most of all, they wanted the songs. They wanted to hear the words and the music that would remind them of when they were young and first fell in love. Music has a way of doing that.

So they gathered in a large room with a couple hundred people. The guests of honor sat in two chairs next to each other—white hair, wrinkles, canes and trifocals. They began to hear these songs sung that expressed the love and memories of a lifetime. They began to remember. It was the most amazing thing.

She looked at him, and in her eyes, he was not old and trembling anymore. He was once again the young, well-built, strong, handsome groom that she had pledged herself to sixty-five years earlier. And when he looked at her, he didn’t see what anybody else saw. He didn’t see wrinkles and white hair. He saw the slender, smooth-skinned, raven haired girl of his dreams.

They stood up and began one last dance together. It took them a while just to be able to stand up. At first, they only shuffled awkwardly, and then somehow, they were moving with grace. His back was straight and firm and tall, and her face was lifted beaming up towards him. Sixty-five years just melted away, and they were a bride and a groom again, and it was all because of one song.

Jesus said to his friends:

I want you to remember. I want you to come to my table, this is the only table I will ever have, this borrowed table. Where anybody can come and I will offer all that I have, which is me. I want you to remember.

And when you do it right, what you'll find is I'll be there again — I'll be there again — I'll be right there with you. This is part of what makes the sacrament a holy moment and a sacred thing. Present once before ... becomes present once again. Jesus is the host at the only table He ever had, and He offers us the only thing that He, in His poverty, had to offer, and that is Himself.

Now it's our turn. Now this is our moment. And what is so remarkable about this is Jesus is here.

Baptism is a one time only deal. If you've been baptized once you never have to get baptized again.

Communion, on the other hand, Jesus instituted so that we would keep on doing it on a regular basis until the day that we die. Baptism never has to be repeated. Communion has to be redone, redone, redone as long as you live. Why? It's because we keep sinning, because I keep messing up, because I keep falling down, because I keep forgetting. I'm tempted to despair. I'm tempted to think, "God, have you given up on me yet?" And I'm tempted to think, "This time, I've gone too far." And I come to the table, the Lord's Table, so Jesus can say once more, "Remember; not remember your guilt, not remember your failure, not remember your shortcomings, not remember your brokenness, remember me" he says. "I'll come back and love you. Come back to My only table." Jesus says:

Do this in remembrance of Me. (I Corinthians 11:24 NIV)

I don't know about you, but these moments are holy moments, and sometimes I remember when I was first saved ... when I first understood that God loved me, as best I could do it at that time in

my life, and I gave my life to Him. If that hadn't happened to me, I can't imagine what my life would have been like without God.

I remember almost six years ago, the first time in the thirty eight years Joan and I had know each other, that we came to the Lord's Table together. We both received communion for the first time together, holding hands with each other; thanking Him for bringing us together for the start of another journey in our lives.

Sometimes when I come to the Lord's Table, I remember a deep regret that I have. I think about something that I have done in the recent past that was messed up, and I feel great regret. Then I remember, "Oh yeah, I'm forgiven." It's not that what I did was OK ... not that it's excusable ... but that I'm forgiven because of what Jesus did. And I'm so grateful.

Sometimes I just think about how brave Jesus was and what a beautiful life He lead, and all about His love for His best friends when He was about to die. And I realize He did that because He loved me and I just think about Him. What a great Man He was and how much He loved me. I think about why He went to the cross. And I just say "Jesus, I'm so sorry whenever I forget you, I'm so glad I get to remember you right now."

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, tell Him you'd just like to know more about Him. If you're ready to receive Him right now as your forgiver and savior, you can do that right now, today, just confess and receive Him and give Him your life. You could make that decision right now; and you could receive communion in just a moment as a follower of His.

If you don't know Him, then just keep your seat and maybe contemplate a future relationship with Him. The writers of Scripture would advise that when it's time for Communion, you abstain. This is a practice that is meaningful only when you have a relationship with Him. You want to wait until you are in that relationship, so it can be really meaningful.

For everybody who knows Jesus— doesn't matter whether or not you're a member of this church — if you know and follow Jesus, this is the Lord's Table. It's not our table. It's the Lord's Table, and we come together ... to His Table and remember.

Would you take a moment right now just to remember?

Jesus, thank you that you invite us to your table, and now we get ready to come; now we want to remember.