

“In Remembrance”
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Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Last year, on Super Bowl Sunday, I preached a sermon entitled “Time Out.” In addition to being Super Bowl Sunday, it was also Transfiguration Sunday, and in the sermon, I talked about Jesus taking “time out” with his disciples to go to the mountain and be apart with God. And I suggested that every time anyone heard the words “time out” during that particular game, they should think about taking “time out” with God themselves. I don’t think I ever told anybody this, but after about the fourth time out, even I was annoyed, because I couldn’t think of anything else but what I had said in the sermon.

Well, in a somewhat similar but much more positive way, Jesus did much the same thing with His disciples as they gathered at a table for a last meal together. It was not long before He would walk the way of the cross, and He knew He had precious little time left to spend with His beloved followers. He needed to care for them, and leave them with something on which to rely, something from which to draw strength .

And so, He sat down at table with them, and using the ordinary things of life - bread and wine - He gave them something that would last forever, and something that would strengthen them all the days ahead.

First, He picked up a loaf of bread, gave God thanks for it, broke it and holding it up before His brothers, said to them, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And then He lifted the chalice filled with wine, gave thanks for it, and said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. Drink this in remembrance of me.”

There may not have been much better that Jesus could have done at that point. For never again would those men ever be able to look at bread and wine and not think of Him. Never again.

They would always be connected with Him, and the bread and wine would

remind them of that. He would always be present with them, and the bread and wine would remind them of that. Who He was, and what He did, and why He came, and the price He paid for them would be right there in front of them every time they saw the bread and wine.

And if that wasn't enough, on that same night, He gave them something else by which to remember Him - another powerful symbol. He knelt down in the dust and dirt, and washed their feet. **He washed their feet!** He, the Master, He, the Savior, knelt down and washed His followers' feet! And in that humble act, He called them to remember Him for a third reason - for His service to those in need.

And you know that every time from that day forth that they saw a towel and basin, or saw a slave washing someone's feet, they remembered Him and that moment.

Remembering is a powerful thing - and Jesus knew that so well! Remembering inspires us, strengthens us, empowers us, emboldens us, and surely sustains us.

Let me give you an example. This week I read again about the awful tragedies of the Nazi prison camps during the Holocaust. You may recall that one of the horrific things the Nazis did was to herd the Jews into supposed "showers", where in fact they were gassed to death. Well, it didn't take long for the Jews to know what was going on, so when they were called to go to the showers, they knew they were going to die.

Sometimes, there would be a rabbi among the Jews herded into the showers, and what I learned about in this reading, was that when other Jews were forced to go in and remove the dead, they would find a remarkable sight. They would find all the children from the group heaped around the rabbi, for the rabbi would have called all the children to himself and told them the stories that had sustained the Jews through the better part of 4000 years. As the one who told this story put it, it was as if the rabbis were saying, "Come near to me, my children, and let me tell you about Moses and David, and Ruth and Esther. Remember. Remember there is more than this moment. There is more than this fear. There is more than death."

Remembering is powerful. Remembering strengthens us. Remembering reminds us that we are not alone. Remembering causes us to recall what was done for us, and who did it. Remembering sustains us and carries us through.

And so, on this very special night, we remember. We remember the price that was paid for our lives, the burden that was lifted for us, the life laid down for us and for our salvation. We remember the gift we were given by grace, not because

we earned it, or deserved it, but because of God's overwhelming love and grace.

But, if all we did was remember, it would not be enough. Because after Jesus called the disciples to remember, He also called them to go forth and do likewise. He said that when they broke bread and shared the cup together, and when they knelt down and served others, the world would remember Him. They would know Him because of us.

I couldn't help but think of that, when I read not long ago, in the newspaper, the account of what was happening in Fargo, North Dakota when they were under threat of such severe flooding. Perhaps you read about it too. It was astounding. Thousands of people were in harm's way, they were working feverishly to fill a million sandbags to hold back the water, homes were being evacuated, and people had to pick up and get out pretty quickly.

But what was amazing was that most of the people did not end up in the shelters, but ended up in private homes. Everybody pitched in and helped. One family, who was leaving town on vacation, even called the police station, and left the security code to their house, and told the police to let anybody use it that needed to - anybody! In Fargo, North Dakota, it seems that everyone opened up their doors, shared what they had, didn't ask questions, just, in the fashion of Jesus, "knelt down and took care of others." When a reporter questioned why so few displaced people were in the shelters, a resident said, "That's just the way we do things up here! We take care of each other!"

Don't you know Jesus smiled over that? That's what He meant on that night so long ago. That's what He asked His followers then, and us now, to do - to care for others as He cared. For in so doing, we will not only care for their needs, but we will bring to the world the remembrance of Him.

So let me close with an image for us to think on, on this Maundy Thursday night. It comes from a man named John Beck, who as a young man was a football star at the University of Kentucky, but later served as a Chaplain for the United States Olympic Team. It was while serving as a chaplain of those gifted athletes that John Beck decided that those teams were a picture of what Christianity really ought to be. Sincere and devoted young people who were willing to pay any price for victory.

Then, one day, something happened that changed him. He visited the Special Olympics, and was watching the hundred yard dash. There were eight runners, and halfway through the race one of them fell down, skinned his knee, and started to cry. All of the other runners stopped, went back, helped him to his feet, and together the eight of them walked to the finish line. Beck says that's the day he

finally understood the real meaning of the church - as a place where broken people come together to pick each other up in love. (Clergy Journal)

I think Jesus would smile over that too. That the church would come to be known as a place where broken people come together to pick each other up in love. If that's not kneeling at the feet of each other, I don't know what is.

"Remember me," Jesus said. "In the bread, in the cup, in service to others. Remember me."

So on this night, we remember. As we hold the bread, as we drink the cup, we remember. And then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we go forth committed to remember Him as we pick each other up in love, and serve those in need.

Amen.