

Remembering In Order To Forget

Maundy Thursday; Series C

Luke 22:7-20

I once read about a family that had an interesting New Year's Eve tradition. Gathering at their fireplace, they would take down last year's calendar from the wall and a page at a time they would remember the events of the past year. January would be torn off first and with it came the memories of a birthday party or a joyous family event. There were some good laughs and some "Remember that's?" But not all of the memories were happy ones. The family members also recalled the times of anger, the misunderstandings, the hurt and the pain they had caused one another. This act of *remembrance* would be repeated eleven more times until they had gone through the 31 days of December (Donald Deffner, *Sermons For Church Year Festivals*, 50).

An act of *Remembrance*—what does it mean to "remember?" The definition of *remembrance* that we are going to consider this evening is this: "To bring moments and events of the past into the present." This is what that family was doing. In a sense they were "re-living" the past year of their life together. They were bringing those moments and events of the past year into the present for a brief period of time. Bringing the past into the present—this is also what Jesus and his disciples were doing in the Gospel reading this evening. They were preparing to eat the Passover meal. They were making preparations to bring into the present the moments and events of God's past act of salvation and deliverance through the Exodus.

Like all devout Jews who traveled to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover Meal in order to remember the grace and mercy of YHWH, their God. The Passover meal was their meal of *remembrance*. The people of Israel remembered that God heard their ancestors' cry for help and made a way to deliver them from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The people of Israel sacrificed the Passover Lambs each year to remember that God once graciously "passed over" them for the sake of the blood of the lamb that marked the doorposts of their homes. They remembered that God delivered them from oppression and slavery through the parted waters of the Red Sea, saving them through water and buying his people back to be his very own once again. God had made a promise to Abraham that his offspring would be mighty and that they would live at peace with God in a land—the Promised Land. Through the Exodus from Egypt God remembered that promise and was bringing his people into the land he swore to them. And so every year the people ate a meal of *remembrance* to remember that God remembered them and his promise to them. They brought the past into the present.

But the Passover meal that we read about this evening was different. This was not only the Passover meal that Jesus and the disciples were eating but it was also the Last Supper that they would eat together. This was the night of Jesus' betrayal. This was the night before Good Friday and his eventual sacrifice. Jesus tells the disciples two different times on that night that he will not eat or drink with them again. First, he says, "I have earnestly desired to eat the Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it [again] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Lk 22:16). Second, he says, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Lk 22:18). So this was not just a Passover meal of *remembrance*, it was also the Last Supper that Jesus and his disciples would eat together.

It was during this Passover meal that Jesus instituted his own meal of *remembrance*. We heard the words in our Gospel reading. At a particular point in the ritual, he took bread of the Passover meal, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in *remembrance* of me” (Lk 22:19, emphasis mine). After they had eaten he took the cup and said to them, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20). As Jesus says it, the bread in the Passover meal becomes his body and the wine becomes his blood. And he says, “Do this in *remembrance* of me” (Lk 22:19, emphasis mine).

At the Passover Feast the people of Israel annually ate a meal to remember that God remembered his promise to Abraham. This was God’s promise to make them a people that would be many and have a land in which they could worship and serve God freely—the Promised Land. In order for God to keep that promise he needed to save his people and deliver them out of a land in which they were enslaved to another Lord. In the land of Egypt and under the lordship of Pharaoh the people of Israel were separated from God and could not worship him freely. And so God used the body and blood of the Passover Lambs and the water of the Red Sea to save his people and bring them into the Promised Land.

So why is this important? Well, the prophet Jeremiah reminded us in our Old Testament reading that the days were coming when God will make a new covenant with the people of Israel (Jer 31:31). He is doing a new thing. It is not like the covenant that God made when he brought them out of Egypt. Jeremiah likely wrote this prophesy six hundred years before Jesus and his disciples would make preparations to eat the Passover meal and Last Supper that we read about in our Gospel lesson. During that meal he does his new work.

Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper and shows that he is the new Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Very early on in his ministry, John the Baptist points to this Jesus and calls him the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). In our liturgy on Sunday mornings we sing, “Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed” (LSB, “New Testament Canticle, 266-267). At this Passover meal of *remembrance* God brings the past into the present. He remembers his promise to let nothing stand in the way of him and his people. Not Sin! Not death! Not Hell! Not Satan! He will be their God and they will be his people (Jer 31:33). In order for God to keep his promise he has to do something new—a “New Exodus Work.”

At the beginning of the sermon I told you about one family’s annual New Year’s Eve tradition. They would sit around a fireplace and go through last year’s calendar remembering joyous events while also remembering some of the times of anger, the misunderstandings, and the hurt and the pain they had caused one another. But their whole tradition was not just one of *remembrance*. They weren’t just bringing moments and events from the past year into the present. The pleasant events and the good memories I am sure they kept and held onto. But they did something else with the times of anger, the misunderstandings, and the hurt and pain they caused one another. They brought these past moments and events into the present in order to talk about them and forgive them. By going through the whole year the family was practicing daily forgiveness. They remembered in order to forget. And then they symbolized this act of forgiveness by tossing each of the pages of the calendar into the fire.

This is what our God does for us through Christ and his “New Exodus Work.” God remembered your Sin and the terrible separation that it causes between you and him. He remembered it so that through his Firstborn Son and the sacrifice of his body and his blood he could forgive it and forget it—remembering in order to forget. The blood of this pure, spotless

Passover Lamb is holy enough and powerful enough to satisfy God's wrath and anger over the Sin that would otherwise leave you in a different land and oppressed under a different Lord.

And so Jesus commands his disciples and all who would wish to be reconciled with the one and only God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—"do this in *remembrance* of me" (Lk 22:19). It is as if he is saying, "The old has gone and the new has come. In my body and my blood, and through my sacrifice, the Passover meal is fulfilled." So, brothers and sisters, look to this one and trust in his sacrifice. For, only in this Christ does God keep his promise to save and deliver even you by the forgiveness of your Sin. In Christ God is making all things new (Rev 21:5).

So let us partake of the Lord's Supper reverently and as often as we can. This is a precious meal. It is the meal where we receive the very forgiveness that we need from God so that we can be saved as God's very own and live eternally with him and all his forgiven children in Christ. In this meal we remember that God has kept his promise and united us to be his people, sons and daughters of Abraham, children of Israel, who live freely and unto eternity in the Promised Land. Amen.