

Remember

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 (The Message)

John 13: 34-35 (The Message)

(Maundy Thursday, April 6, 2023, Augsburg University Chapel)

²³⁻²⁶ Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said,

This is my body, broken for you.

Do this to remember me.

After supper, he did the same thing with the cup:

This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you.

Each time you drink this cup, remember me.

What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt. (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)

³⁴⁻³⁵ "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other." (John 13: 34-35)

This morning we hear these familiar passages from Paul's letter to the community at Corinth and from John's gospel – passages assigned for this Maundy Thursday; maundy from the Latin mandatum, referring to Jesus's mandate to his disciples that they remember, gather at table, wash each other's feet, and love one another.

On this Maundy Thursday, I'm drawn to Eugene Peterson's translation (in *The Message*) of Paul's message to the Corinthians in verse 26: "You must never let familiarity breed contempt." – and I wonder if in that mandate we might find a renewed call for God's faithful people in the world. Perhaps familiarity is our stumbling block...

Nearly 2000 years after Jesus gathered with his disciples for the Passover meal, so much of our lives are grounded in the familiar – familiar words and rituals, familiar excuses, familiar behavior, familiar comforts, familiar expectations. What would it look like to step back from the familiar – to fight the temptation of contempt – and to renew our calls to be God's Easter people in the world?

Come with me as we explore what such a Maundy Thursday call might look like...

First, we are called to *reenact* that Passover, for as Paul tells us, "every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master." Is that what we really do? In my Lutheran Christian tradition, we come to the altar every week to celebrate

Holy Communion with little wafers and little cups – we hear the familiar words of institution, we walk the familiar routes, we depart with familiar blessings. Some still use a common cup, though likely not as often as pre-pandemic. Others are experimenting with less familiar forms of reenactment like dinner church or communion outside of church walls. I think of what happened during the Covid pandemic when many of us communed alone at home, watching a screen, perhaps with the pre-packaged wine and wafer (who knew there was such a thing!) And though that was a necessary change to our reenacting the Lord's Supper, perhaps its lack of familiarity reminded us of why gathering at table together is so central to our calls to live as God's people in the world.

But reenactment of any form is not simply the ritual practice, it must be the occasion to *reflect* on what the ritual points to, to reflect on the death of Jesus, to find in the experience of gathering at table the meaning, the inspiration, the emotions, that propel us to a deeper faith, a less familiar path forward. Some of my most meaningful experiences of reenactment came in the kitchens or hospital rooms of the parishioners I served as pastor at a small church in Indiana. There was something about those intimate moments that challenged the familiar, that led me to reflect on what it all meant for God's people in the world. One particular moment was in a hospital room with Betty and her family. She had been away from our little church for several weeks and very much wanted to celebrate Holy Communion as a way of being connected to her faith community. I spoke the words of institution, shared the bread with those gathered, and then passed a cup of wine around our circle. Betty was the last one to receive the cup and instead of the tiny sip each of us had taken, she proceeded to "chug" down all the wine that remained. We might laugh about Betty missing her daily happy hours, but instead what I found meaningful in that moment was that Betty understood, Betty believed that drinking from that cup was the gift of her faith, and when she took that cup in her hands, she said to herself, "here is the blood of Christ, shed for me and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. I will take a big swig from this cup, because I know that Christ died for me - I believe". Betty died shortly after that moment, but I know she did so in the blessed assurance of Christ's love.

We are called to reenact and to reflect so that we might *reimagine*. I think one of the important facts about Jesus's final days that we must recall is that he was executed at the will of the religious elite of his time and at the hand of the empire's anointed representative. When we forget this in the midst of the familiar rituals of our faith, we succumb to the temptation of contempt – contempt for the authentic calls we receive from our God who overcame death and grave on Easter morning, our God whose rule challenges earthly power and privilege. The Old Testament scholar and renowned preacher, Walter Brueggemann, challenges us to the work of what he calls prophetic imagination. In a passage from his *Journey to the Common Good*, Brueggemann writes:

"It is our propensity, in society and in church, to trust the narrative of scarcity. That is what makes us greedy, and selfish, and coercive. Even the Eucharist can be made into an occasion of scarcity, as though there were not enough for all, Such scarcity leads to exclusion at the table, even as scarcity leads to exclusion from economic life. But the narrative of abundance persists among us. Those who sign on and depart the system of anxious scarcity become the historymakers in the neighborhood...those who have enough energy to dream and hope..(from which)

come such neighborly miracles as good health care, good schools, good health care, good care for the earth, and disarmament.” (pp. 34-35)

At the Lord’s table – set for all - we reimagine what it means to live as those who know God’s abundance, to be the historymakers we are called to be!

And all of this, then, brings us to the call imbedded in the words of institution themselves: “Do this to *remember* me.” And though we may hear the word “remember” as pointing us to some past event, recalling something from long ago, what if, instead, we hear “remember” as a call to the work that is here and now, the work of re-membering the body of Christ on earth now, the work of reenacting, reflecting, and reimagining what we are called to be and do in the world as God’s faithful people.

The 15th century mystic, Teresa of Avila, captures this call powerfully:

*Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
compassion on this world
Christ has no body now on earth but yours*

We are called to be the body of Christ on earth now, not letting familiarity bred contempt, not accepting a narrative of scarcity, so that we might love our neighbors and our neighborhoods with our hearts and hands and minds. Reenact, reflect, reimagine, remember. **Do this**, my friends. Blessings in these three most holy days. Amen.