

Sermon - Acts of Remembrance – Andris Berry – September 11, 2022
Luke 22:19

Today I want to talk about remembering. How do we remember personally, in community and as a nation? What does it mean to remember those who are no longer with us? What does it mean to remember those things that have passed? **And, perhaps most important, why do we gather together to remember Jesus and enter into the Gospel story again and again?**

1.

Last week in Peru, there was a lovely service held on the town green in memory of Pastor Margaret. Margaret was known in Peru as the barefoot pastor. She had also been a bartender in Manchester. In both church and barroom, her powerful singing voice would raise the roof. I heard again and again how Margaret was “real.” One story referenced a time when Margaret organized a Robin Hood-type theft, which involved breaking and entering, in order to raise money for the church. Certainly not something just any pastor would do (or tell about). She brought the gospel to life for her congregation every Sunday. With Margaret, everyone felt welcome.

A young woman gave a very moving remembrance. Margaret had been her nanny from the time she was a little girl. She spoke about how, when she was a child, Margaret really listened to her and made her feel valuable and important and that she didn’t need to “grow up” in order to be heard. Margaret was also firm with her and had boundaries, but all of those boundaries were nested in a deep and enduring love. This young woman is now herself a nanny and she has a wonderful example to follow through the remembrance of her experience of Margaret. She has taken from Margaret’s care and love and now passes on her own care and love to a new generation of children.

What a blessing to have such people in our lives. You see, Margaret revealed the Christ in herself to this young woman. This is a gift that multiplies.

2.

I had a dear friend named John Swanson. He passed away early last fall. John was an artist. Many of his beautiful paintings cover the walls of our family home. Like Margaret, he had a special way of revealing Christ to others. Being around John was always an adventure. He had friendships with priests and nuns, and ex-convicts and former gang-bangers. He was very wise, but in a way that was simple, humble and childlike at times. If you went out to dinner with John, he might disappear midway through the meal so he could talk to the cooks and the dishwashers (who were usually immigrants) and inquire about their families and background. He felt a kinship with immigrants because his mother had also been an immigrant. John had a way of making everyone around him feel not just special, but he gave you a sense that you had something of immeasurable value in you, something divine that needed to be expressed. He looked for that in you and saw it, often more clearly than you did yourself.

John's colorful and intricate artwork can brighten a room. But what I found in John's person was something that I can only describe as alchemical. Imagine you have a glass of clean clear water and you put in a drop of dirty water. The whole glass would seem dirty. Now imagine you have a glass full of dirty water. Imagine you could put a drop of pure water into this glass and watch the entire glass become clean and clear. John was like this drop of pure water to the people in his life.

I will always remember how John revealed the Christ in himself to his friends, and reminded us of the Christ in ourselves. My remembrance of John guides me still

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3.

Our scripture reading today places us at the table with Jesus and his disciples. They were sharing the Passover dinner. The Passover is a time when the people of Israel remember leaving bondage in Egypt. The Passover was and still is celebrated every year. During this supper, gathered around the table with friends, Jesus does what he does everywhere he goes. He takes a simple, common gesture and he reveals in it the presence and nature of God. In those days, the washing feet, the celebration of a wedding, the drawing of water from a well, the harvesting of grain, were common everyday things that people just did. With Jesus they all take on a special, holy significance. He showed that the encounter with the divine is available to us all, at any moment, and even in the most basic of life's routines.

When Jesus broke the bread at this Passover meal, he gave thanks as usual for it, but then said something unusual. He said, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

The word "Remember" comes from the old Latin "**remorari**," meaning "to call to mind." We tend to think of memory as something passive, a recollecting of images, sensations, feelings, words, facts and figures. Memory seems to be something apart from the body. But the act of remembering is something else. At least, it seems to me that Jesus means something more in this moment. It is something active and creative.

The word "remember" also has a very physical, bodily connotation. We refer to our arms and legs as members of our body. We can also refer to ourselves as members of a congregation or group or a "body" politic. In this sense, to re-member would literally be "to put the body back together." When Jesus says, "This is my body, broken...do this in re-rememberance," he is asking his disciples not to recall him to mind, but, once he was no longer among them, to put him back together, re-assemble him, resurrect him in their midst. Jesus said, "**where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.**" (Matthew 18:20)

Now we can also think of the opposite of re-membering. To "dis-member" is to take apart the body. Or in another sense, to break apart a fellowship or group of people. On

the night of the Last Supper, Jesus knew that his little group of disciples was about to be scattered. He knew they might be hunted, that one of his closest friends would even deny knowing him. He knew that his trial and violent death would traumatize his friends and their whole world would be shattered a few short hours after the breaking of bread. So he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." When the trauma has passed, after you have all run away, come back together, gather and share a meal, and I will be with you. You will remember.

So the act of gathering together is itself an act of remembering. And when we gather in remembrance of Jesus, then he is with us.

4.

On the morning of 9/11, our nation experienced a trauma unlike anything that had come before. We lost loved ones and even if we did not know anyone who died, our hearts ached for those who did. But the tragedy did not end there. In the brief moment after that day, we united, but then somehow directed our grief into wars that lasted twenty years and multiplied the initial suffering a hundred fold. The countless deaths overseas and countless soldiers who returned home, forever traumatized with PTSD, must somehow be remembered in the whole picture of 9/11. In the days and years that followed 9/11, we lost a sense of peace and security. It seems so long now it's getting harder to remember the time when we were not so bitterly divided along political lines, not so fearful of travel, not so fearful of our neighbors, not so heavily surveilled and censored and pushed by media towards hating one another. 9/11 dismembered us and I think we are still struggling to remember the time "before", we are still struggling to heal, to put ourselves back together and return to our better selves as a nation.

How do we heal? How do we put ourselves back together? I don't know. I can't answer that question. Healing is hard enough for each soul. How does a nation do it? How the world?

One thing we can do is look to and point to the cross.

5.

When Jesus was killed, his disciples were devastated. The initial trauma of Jesus' trial and execution must have overshadowed all the teaching and healing and wonderful things they had experienced. Jesus knew this would happen. He also knew that the disciples would gather again. They were fishing in the dark one early morning, drawing in their empty nets, when they saw a small fire flickering on the shore. They remembered Jesus and he was with them. And it is because of the men and women who remembered Jesus, then and through the ages, that we remember him today. We know him from the stories they told and wrote down and shared the world over. That is why we gather today, to tell the same story, the Gospel, the good news that Jesus

manifested to us, that makes us new and reminds us that we are brothers and sisters, children of the One Creator which gave us life.

How do we heal? Perhaps it begins with gathering and remembering together. Perhaps we can recognize how badly we were fragmented and seek in our own ways to put the pieces back together. Remembering our values, and a time that was less divisive, less fraught with fear, less angry and confused. To remember is to bring something from the past back, to reassemble, both in thought and action. To remember together is an act of creation because it guides our movement forward. Remembrance puts things back together. We experience this, we can feel it in our bodies when we remember someone we love, or when we experience a hurt that was suffered, even long ago.

If we are to have a more complete picture, we should know that John Swanson was a man who suffered a lot in his life. Pastor Margaret was also a person who suffered a lot. However, we are left not with their suffering, but with the memory of their loving lives. Despite their suffering, despite the darkness they endured and struggled with, they could uplift and purify a room full of people. They remembered Jesus often in sermons, artwork and life.

This week, whenever you sit down to a meal, whether or not you eat bread, remember Jesus. The simple act of sharing a meal is a sacred one. Remember Jesus and know that he is with you. To bring the Christ within us into mix at all times, wherever we are, that is the goal. But mealtime is a good place to start.

Why do we gather together to remember Jesus and enter into the Gospel story again and again? We need the reaffirmation. We need to make sure our compass is calibrated, pointing north as it should. That is what the Gospel does. That is what people like Margaret and John do for us. We gather, we remember, we call Christ into our midst, into our selves and give that gift to each other. Remembering can be an act of creation, an act of putting ourselves together, of incorporating the lessons learned, the examples followed that call us to new life.

I pray that you are blessed with renewal and that we all may bless the world with Christ remembered in us.

Amen.

Prayer of Pastoral Care September 11, 2022

Sisters and brothers, there is joy in heaven every time we turn toward our home and remember whose we are. With open hearts, let us pray to our God of compassion
with the response, hear our prayer.

Gracious God, when our spirits lift at the beauty of the day, you are Lord; and when chaos threatens to overwhelm, and we fear the next news cycle—still, you are Lord. Always you are creating, redeeming, sustaining. Speak then your mercy into this place until we discover the courage to open our eyes, unclench our hands, and move toward our neighbor in need. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

Spirit of Life, in the beginning you hovered over creation; still, you care for our world.

We pray for the earth that mourns: for rivers and streams lacking sufficient water; for places devastated by drought & wildfires, and others vulnerable to flash floods. We pray for the oceans and all creatures of the sea impacted by waste and rising temperatures.

Be with people seriously affected by heat in our own land and throughout the world.

May we be strengthened in resolve and action to be faithful stewards of your creation.

God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who cannot rest in safety, who must remain alert to signs of danger because their countries are torn apart by war. Be with the people of Ukraine, of Syria,

of northeast Nigeria, and all places of conflict. Help us in our support of refugees, and in feeding the hungry and despairing. We pray for those whose homes are torn by violence, and those who have no shelter but the street. Help us to move with compassion toward those who are in need.

God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for the life and remarkable reign of Queen Elizabeth, and pray for all in the United Kingdom in the years ahead. Be with all who have faced death, and recently lost loved ones. On this anniversary of 9/11, we pray for all who live with memories

and suffering from that time, and for all who ministered to survivors. We thank you for the community of the church and for all places where people are accepted and treated with dignity. May we continue to discover what it means to be part of the body of Christ as servants here at home and in our world. God of compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We bring before you those on this church's immediate needs list.

We thank you, O God, for your presence in each reminder of life's grace.

May that grace overflow from our lives that we might honor your name in the world. In the name of Jesus, who came to seek and save what was lost. Amen.

OFFERING We remember as a shepherd searches for a lost sheep, as a woman searches for a lost coin, God seeks us out to save us. With gratitude and joy, let us offer our lives to the Lord.

***DOXOLOGY AND PRAYER**

Holy God, receive our offerings as you receive our lives. Enliven us with your breath

that we may show forth your glory., In the name of Jesus and by the power of your Spirit,

we pray. Amen.