

IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

¹⁴When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' ¹⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' ¹⁹Then he took a loaf of bread, 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.' ²⁰And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22:14-20, NRSV)

A life devoid of memory is a life devoid of meaning. Those taking care of loved ones who suffer from Alzheimer's face this tragedy every day. Children, spouses, and old friends gradually become total strangers to the Alzheimer's patient as memory itself becomes a thing of the past. Memory—it reminds us of who we are and from whence we came. Without memory we cannot understand others or ourselves. Without memory it's difficult to make plans for the future.

Jesus knew the importance of memory. The night before he died Christ spent an intimate and intense meal with his friends, his disciples in the Upper Room. As he reinterpreted the Passover meal with himself as the sacrificial lamb, Jesus gave new meaning to the bread and the wine. He then implored his disciples to remember,

remember that fateful night, remember his life of love, remember his teachings on grace, remember that the bread and the wine, symbolizing his body and blood, was in some mysterious way for them and their benefit. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

While in our branch of Protestantism we only take Communion four or five times a year, we do seek to remember Christ in our church’s worship services and other activities. However, sometimes we get so busy that it’s easy to forget why we do what we do. Then Lent comes along with its challenge to examine our lives and priorities, its challenge to focus more on our spiritual pilgrimage and connection to God. This challenge pertains not only to each of us as individual believers, but also to the life of our church as a whole.

In life we sometimes do the right thing for all the wrong reasons. Conversely, we sometimes do the wrong thing for all the right reasons. Instead of losing our way in a maze of second-guessing, a better option would simply be doing whatever we do in memory and in honor of Christ. When we measure our actions against the yardstick of Christ’s mandate to love God, others, and ourselves then we are sure to stay on the right track.

Lent gives us the opportunity to take stock of what we’re doing and where we’re heading in life. Lent offers us the opportunity for a change of course as needed. Communion offers a similar, albeit more brief, opportunity. During Communion we remember Christ in the Upper Room, his voice tender yet tense. The handwriting is on the wall for him and there’s so much he wants to tell us. In the earliest accounts from the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus says little in the Upper Room. He has no inspirational sermon to offer on the eve of his death. Instead, according to those in the room with him that night, his

foremost concern and their primary memory involved the bread and wine.

The disciples walked into the room expecting a traditional Passover feast. They walked out several hours later, having heard Jesus proclaim his imminent death and having shared what we now know as Holy Communion. Jesus took them all by surprise when he took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (v. 19b). After the meal ended Jesus did the same thing with the cup of wine and said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (v. 20b). No doubt the reality of these words crashed down upon them in the next few hours when Jesus was arrested, beaten, tried, and eventually crucified. What a nightmare it must have been, their friend and teacher taken from them. The violence, the injustice, the fear.

Thank God, quite literally, thank God the story doesn't end with Jesus' broken body and spilled blood. Christ's miraculous Resurrection soon transcended the horrors of Good Friday. But the followers of Jesus, Christians throughout the ages, have never forgotten the conversation that took place in that Upper Room during the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. Whether hiding in the dark catacombs under Rome or worshipping in the light cast through stained glass windows, whether gathering in simple country churches or in dilapidated inner city sanctuaries, Christians in every time and place have recalled the broken bread and the broken body, the cup of wine and the poured out blood of Jesus. Believers like us have been gathering to celebrate Communion since the first century AD. Some have used unleavened bread while others have used rice cakes; some have drunk grape juice while others have drunk wine. Differences abound.

Despite our differences, we gather around God's table to remember. When we take Communion we remember that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We eat the broken bread and drink the crimson cup remembering Christ's death on the cross, remembering all of those areas in our own lives that are broken and battered, remembering all those whose lives have been battered and broken in our world. In addition to remembering the past, we think of the present: our worries and fears, our joys and blessings and God's sustaining presence in the middle of it all. Around this table, as we share the bread and wine, we also look to the future—a future that promises life everlasting where God will gather us beyond the confines of this earthly life around the heavenly banquet table where we will dwell together for all eternity. Let us remember these promises today, tomorrow, and forever. AMEN.

Written by Rev. Jimmy Only

Lent I

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The Congregational Church of Manhasset, New York (UCC)

PASTORAL PRAYER

Most Merciful God,

We ask your help as we move through this season of Lent that we might honestly assess our lives, where we are with you, our families, our friends, and our needy world. Give us strength to make the changes that need to be made and to leave behind the guilt or pain that holds us back. Help us give our all to you and to those in need. We pray for the many troubled spots in our world, for world leaders that there might be peace, for the family having a difficult time with their children, for the children having a difficult time with aging parents.

In all of these situations and those that are known only to you we ask your grace, strength, and courage, through Jesus Christ we pray. AMEN.