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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Maundy Thursday, Series A
Thursday, April 13th, 2017

Sermon: Remember¹

Text: Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Focus Statement: Christ gives us his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Function Statement: That they would remember Christ's sacrifice and recognize his body.

Sermon Structure: Story Explained

Doctrinal Locus: "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation" (SC, Sacrament of the Altar).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our meditation tonight is on these words of Jesus: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24b, ESV).² Memory is powerful. A familiar scent, a favorite song, and the late afternoon sun all have a way of conjuring up memories of people, places, and experiences from the past. We keep records of the present—photographs, home videos, diaries, and blogs—so that in the future we can remember the past. For most of us the past is just that—the past. We can recall it through memory, but the past is where it stays. It doesn't really come alive or stay with us in a real and tangible way. And eventually, like old photographs, memories fade.

But for the Jews of Jesus' day, memories came to life through the retelling. History was a story in which people could participate in the past here and now. Every year the Jews celebrate the feast of the Passover as God commanded, remembering the night of their hasty flight out of Egypt. "This day shall be for you a memorial day," declared the Lord. "Throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast" (Ex. 12:14). The Passover recalled that night when the angel of death passed through the land of Egypt, killing the firstborn son of

¹ An earlier version of this sermon was preached at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Englewood, Colorado, on Thursday, March 20th, 2008.

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

every Egyptian. But every Hebrew home was passed over, and the people were spared. It was on that night that the Lord saved them and brought them up out of slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus 12, God gave Moses and the children of Israel instructions for how to observe the first Passover. Each Hebrew family was to butcher a lamb without blemish and spatter its blood on the doorposts of their house. The blood was the sign for the angel of death to pass over that house and spare their lives. “The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:13). While their Egyptian oppressors cried out in the terror of the night, the Hebrews enjoyed a feast of roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. The lamb recalled the saving blood sprinkled on the doorposts. The bitter herbs symbolized the bitter hardship and labor of the Hebrews’ time in slavery. The unleavened bread, a flatbread without yeast, symbolized the haste with which they prepared and ate the Passover, for the very next morning, the Hebrews hurried out of Egypt.

To this day, every year at Passover, one of the children is instructed to ask, “Why is this night different than all others?” Then the father answers, “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.... By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Ex. 13:8, 14). Passover is about what the Lord did for *me*, how he brought *us* out of Egypt. In this way everyone who eats the Passover is included in the narrative. By celebrating the feast each year, they reenact the history and become part of it. Memory comes to life!

But the Passover also foreshadowed, or looked forward to, a future fulfillment: Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper. It was in the context of such a Passover meal that Jesus first instituted the Eucharist, or Holy Communion. St. Paul recalls the *Verba* he received and passed

onto us: “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor. 11:24b-26).

All the elements of the Passover were there on the table: roast lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and wine. But now a greater Lamb was present: Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He is the Lamb who was slain and whose blood was spattered on the cross instead of a doorframe, opening the door to heaven for all who believe in him. The suffering symbolized by the bitter herbs was not merely the slavery of Israel, but more importantly the bitter suffering and innocent death of Jesus. The bread they ate was the very body of Christ. And the cup they drank was the very blood of Jesus “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Traditionally, we have called that Passover on the Thursday of Holy Week the “Last Supper.” But it was anything but that! That “Last” Supper in the upper room was the first *Lord’s* Supper, the first of many to be celebrated. Every time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we participate in that history. When we speak Jesus’ Words of Institution (Latin: *Verba*), the past comes to life! We reenact the first Eucharist when Jesus gave his body and blood to his disciples. That is why Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Just as the Jews eating Passover participate in the salvation history of the Exodus, so also we live out and participate in the redemption that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. When we come to the Lord’s Table, we gather around the table in the upper room. Christ is present here—yes, through the Church, the body of Christ—but most importantly through the Word and by means of the bread and wine that become his body and blood. Christ is here, and he offers forgiveness of sins to every sinner,

including you and me. This meal brings salvation. This supper gives life. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (SC, Sacrament of the Altar).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus’ body and blood *are* truly present “in, with, and under” (Luther) the common elements of bread and wine, giving life and forgiveness to all who receive them by faith. That is why Paul also says that as often as we eat of this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s *death* until he comes. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we remember that Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins. This remembrance is not an ongoing sacrifice of Jesus (as the Roman Church teaches). Jesus died on the cross once for all, and his death was the final sacrifice (Heb. 10:10). But when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember his sacrifice with joy and thanksgiving. (Some Christians, such as the Eastern Orthodox, actually call the Lord’s Supper the Eucharist, which is the Greek word for “thanksgiving.”) The cross of Christ is always at the center of our proclamation. We proclaim Jesus’ death not only amongst ourselves, but also to our unbelieving friends and family who need to know the Lord. Paul resolved to know nothing but Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). This is what we remember.

But there is something else we remember also. We proclaim the Lord’s death *until he comes* (1 Cor. 11:26). Jesus is coming back. “I am coming soon,” he says four times in the Book of Revelation. And when Jesus comes, he will gather his Church for that final feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). That supper will have the best food and drink, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (Isa. 25:6). It will be a feast with no need for reenactment, no need for remembrance, because it will be an unending feast that lasts forever.

Our celebration of the Lord's Supper anticipates that Last Day. It is "a foretaste of the feast to come." But do not scorn the feast before you now; it is not lowly. We do this in remembrance of him. For here are Jesus' body and blood given into death *for you!* They bring you the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. What more do you need? Come, the table is ready. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8a). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.