

“In Remembrance” – Maundy Thursday, March 24, 2016

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Meditation by the Rev. Douglas Clark, Haddam and Higganum Congregational Churches

A long time ago, a very long time ago, the city of Jerusalem was crowded with multitudes of Jewish men and women and children who had come to the city for the annual Passover festival. Among this multitude of pilgrims was a ragtag band of Jewish men from rural Galilee—Jesus of Nazareth and his twelve closest followers. Following Jesus' instructions, these men had gathered in the upper room of a large house in the city, where he was hosting an evening meal.

It was not unusual for an evening meal like this to include bread and wine and lively conversation. But this was not a typical evening meal. It was in fact Jesus' last supper with this particular group of men. And it became an unforgettable experience—one that remains memorable and unforgettable even now, two thousand years later.

In the middle of the meal, while his followers were eating, Jesus shocked them by saying, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” The men were understandably distressed when they heard this. Each one of them was certain he would never betray Jesus.

After blessing and breaking a loaf of bread, Jesus gave the bread to them and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Then he blessed a cup of wine and gave it to them and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Even though the men at the table had grown accustomed to Jesus' use of surprising figures of speech in his teaching and his preaching, I suspect they were troubled by these words and actions.

Only later, after his crucifixion and resurrection, did the significance of Jesus' words and actions at the last supper begin to dawn on his disciples. They began to realize why he had said to them: “Do this in remembrance of me.” They came to see that the bread and wine they shared during their common meals would remind them not only of his last supper with them, but also of his ongoing presence in their midst.

The book of Acts tells us that after Jesus' resurrection, and after the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, the apostles “spent much time together in the temple” and “broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.” I imagine that these meals were filled with lively conversation as well. I imagine that the apostles shared many stories of the times they had spent with Jesus, and remembered him in this way as well, and felt his ongoing presence in their midst.

So also with us. When we gather in the sanctuary at the table, when we participate in the words and actions of communion, we are doing these things in remembrance of Jesus. When we gather in this sanctuary and share stories of Jesus, we are doing this in remembrance of him. When we do our best to embody the way of Jesus in the world, we are doing this in remembrance of him.

One of my favorite contemporary Christian songs is called, simply, "In Remembrance of Me." I conclude this evening's meditation with the words to this song:

In remembrance of Me eat this bread
In remembrance of Me drink this wine
In remembrance of Me pray for the time
When God's own will is done

In remembrance of me heal the sick
In remembrance of me feed the poor
In remembrance of me open the door
And let [the stranger] in, let [them] in

Take eat and be comforted
Drink and remember too
That this is my body and precious blood
Shed for you, shed for you

In remembrance of me always love
In remembrance of me don't look above
But in your heart, in your heart
Look in your heart for God

Do this in remembrance of Me
Do this in remembrance of Me
In remembrance of Me.¹

1 Ragan Courtney and Buryl Red, <http://www.kennycarter.net/Lyrics/InRemembrance.html>.