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This Holy Mystery: Re-Membering

Last week we opened our series on Holy Communion, delving into the different aspects of this sacred and mysterious meal, exploring first how we are called to come to Christ's table with joy in our hearts and with thankfulness for what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us. I know that focusing so intently on joy within the celebration of communion was counterintuitive for some. Many have been taught that this meal is all about Jesus' death... after all, we share in the Body and Blood of Christ here, right? But we are spending our 5 weeks of lent, delving into this sacramental meal because there is so much more to our theological understanding of communion than the somberness that often accompanies it. It is my prayer that through learning more about the deeper meaning undergirding this meal, and partaking in different ways of receiving the elements each week, that we all grow in our knowledge, experience, and practice of Holy Communion, so that each time we come to this table, we are filled to overflowing with the grace of God and sent out to love and serve as whole and holy members of the Body of Christ.

This week, we draw our focus to the words that you'll often see carved into communion tables or sewn onto vestments... words that you've heard repeated each time you share in this meal.... "Do this in REMEMBRANCE of me." When Christians gather for communion, part of the story we tell is about the last night Jesus shared a meal with his disciples. The scriptures tell us that he took wine, gave thanks, broke bread, drank and ate. Jesus told his disciples to do this and REMEMBER him. And we do... our communion liturgy includes a retelling of that story, calling us all to think about Jesus - how he lived, what he taught, how he died, and how the Holy Spirit continues to carry out his work.

The word translated from Greek into English as "remembrance" is also rendered as the less common word, "anamnesis." We're all familiar with a form of its opposite – amnesia – the loss of memory. Anamnesis was first used by Plato and literally translates as a "loss of forgetfulness." With dementia and Alzheimer's plaguing our society, we know how hard it is to forget... hard for individuals and for their family and friends. People struggling to remember who they are, and who their loved ones are – it's heartbreaking! Anamnesis – the loss of forgetfulness – is an intentional practice of remembering... of surrounding one's self with mementos and trinkets from the past... items that will trigger memories and the emotions that go with them.

You know how it feels when you come across an old trinket, something you got YEARS back from an old friend or beloved family member, and just seeing and holding that trinket again has the power to take you back and make you relive the emotions of the days when your memory was being formed?

The remembrance, or anamnesis, that our scriptures call us to experience in communion is sort like what happens when we take out one of our mementos. We are called to remember Christ; to remember that we are loved and accepted, forgiven and welcomed into relationship with God through Jesus, to remember all that Jesus did and continues to do for us through his life, death, and resurrection, to remember who we are called to be as his followers, and how we are called to live and love in our daily lives.

But does this call to remember – to lose our forgetfulness - simply suggest we shouldn't let this bigger picture of faith slip out of our minds? Does it mean we reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus, so we feel really thankful or really awful as we partake? Remembering Jesus through communion is much more complex than simply a thought exercise, or mere nostalgia. This is a powerful remembrance that influences not only our thoughts, but also our actions and identities.

The remembrance we are called to in communion is much like the remembrance of a wedding anniversary. It's more complex than simply a recollection of a day and its celebration, but ideally, it should be time to reflect on how you're doing in your relationship. How faithfully you are living into the covenant you formed, however many years ago. It should encompass celebration and joy, expressing thanks for the ways you've supported one another over the years, and a recommitment to continue living out the promises you made to one another. This time of remembrance and celebration is more than a fleeting thought, but results in action, strengthening relationships and binding couples closer together as they RE-member their wedding day.

I've heard a variety of commentators and theologians suggest that the opposite of remembering isn't actually forgetting... at least not in communion. The opposite of remembering, they argue, is 'dis-membering'... pulling apart that which belongs together... like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle strewn about. In the wake of the UMC General Conference decisions a few weeks ago... we know something of feeling dis-membered... of feeling separated – or at least of someone trying to dis-member us... to push out those who are progressively minded from our denomination.

It is in these times of division and conflict that we need to hear even louder Christ's call to draw close, to share in fellowship, to build a community of love and care, to make a difference in the world. As we come to the table today, I invite you to remember – to re-connect with all of what it means to follow Jesus in your heart and life. Yes, to remember who Jesus was and is, and what he came to teach us, but also to remember who and whose YOU are.

In Communion, we RE-MEMBER that we are the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Jesus here and now, called to teach about his love and live out his compassion for all of God's beloved children. Through this time of remembrance, we are made whole again as the Body of Christ and sent out with the Spirit's blessing to continue Christ's work. I invite you

this morning to see the broken bread offered to you as a charge, a challenge, as if each person in the room were given a piece of a puzzle and asked to work together to make something cohesive of the pieces.

As we partake this morning, we will do so in a way that helps us experience this remembering and reconnection. Rather than us all coming forward to receive the elements as individuals, we will be sharing communion in small groups today. Rather than one large loaf that is broken and one central cup that is shared, each group will receive roll and a cup to pass from person to person. We will serve each other, and as we do so, I invite us to REMEMBER who Jesus was and is for us, and to RE-MEMBER or re-connect with those who share in this sacred meal with us, as we celebrate being members of the same Body of Christ, called and sent forth to serve and love others. May this time of remembrance inspire and transform us well beyond this time of worship, influencing how we interact with and serve our neighbors in Christ's love. Amen.