

Two Things Are True at the Same Time

My Uncle L.J. was a preacher and evangelist. Near the last of his life, when his daughters would be nearing the end of a visit, he'd tell them, "If I don't see you again, I'll see you in heaven. I'll meet you near the Eastern gate at 3 pm on Wednesday and we'll have a weenie roast. I'll supply the hotdogs, but you have to bring your own sticks." His way of saying goodbye and asking his family to remember him.

When we celebrate the last supper together like Jesus and his disciples did, the whole point is to remember Jesus. All he asks of us is to remember him. What is the best time to remember Jesus? I think it's the same answer to the question: "When's the best time to go fishing?" When you can.

But we don't always, do we? We get distracted by our everyday lives and hung up on our personal concerns, usually mild but also sometimes pretty major. Jesus knows us and knew this would happen. That's one of the reasons he created the last supper – to give us an intentional time and place, along with the elements of the Eucharist, to remember him.

In our New Testament lesson today, we hear the familiar words of the sacrament of the last supper through the Apostle Paul: "Do this in remembrance of me", and "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." We will hear these same words later tonight as we take communion. But these verses cropped from Corinthians are missing the context of the rest of the chapter. Enter the Corinthians. While Paul is merely repeating Jesus' instructions, he is doing so for the benefit of the Corinthians, who have really botched things up. They were doing the exact opposite of the last supper's intention, turning it into a selfish, divided meal. The wealthy ones ate before the others and got drunk, while the poor were left hungry and shamed. This was not how Christ wishes to be remembered.

Do you experience a bit of moral superiority when you read about those Corinthians? (Thank God I'm not like those people). The truth is that I have taken so many communions that sometimes I take it for granted.

Unwelcome thoughts pop into my mind that have nothing to do with remembrance. How about this gem that pops in: “What am I going to do after church?”

When we're remembering our risen Lord, we can experience many emotions. Have you ever felt sadness at his crucifixion and then a second later joy at his resurrection? Knowing that two seemingly opposite things can be true at the same time is crucial to understanding Jesus' teaching. He didn't throw out the law, but he knew how we take something good and turn it into something lousy, so he gave the disciples a new commandment to Love Each Other just as he had loved them. He came to save the world, not to condemn the world, but in the end he will be the final judge. He was killed, yet he lives. See, two things can be true.

Parallels between today's reading of the Exodus Passover story with our New Testament story are obvious. First thing to understand is that Jesus chose the Last Supper on Passover for a reason. The Passover meal didn't just happen to accidentally occur at the same time as the Last Supper. In the familiar story of the Passover, a lamb is sacrificed in each Jewish household and the blood from the lamb is painted over the doorways so that the angel of death will bypass that house and strike down every first-born son of the Egyptians. Definitely a better time to be born female. The Jews are instructed to prepare unleavened bread and be ready to go at a moment's notice, as Moses will soon lead them out of slavery. Does God hate yeast? Of course not, he created it and it's a wonderful thing. Remember two things can be true at once? Wherever you see yeast mentioned in the Bible, it is a symbol for sin, as it spreads throughout the bread. When Jews celebrate Passover, they are remembering God's saving grace as he liberated them from slavery. When Christians celebrate the Last Supper as we will tonight, we remember God's saving grace as he frees us from the slavery of sin. Jesus is the Lamb of God, the final sacrifice. No need for any more sacrifices, it is finished.

Remember when John the Baptizer sees Jesus walking by and says, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”? Amazingly, this was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I feel certain,

although it's not specifically in the Bible, that Jesus and John must have had some very long conversations together. John could have more explicitly said "Behold, there goes Jesus who in a few years will suffer a terrible death and take on all of our sins so that we may be saved".

How do we remember Jesus? This is a time of unity with other believers. Remember two things can be true, we can love our neighbors while at the same time maybe we disagree with them? The sense of unity is best served by taking communion focused on the cross. Especially today, Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus as the lamb of God.

A lot of things happened today. Jesus washed his disciple's feet. He declared his betrayal by one of the disciples. He prophesied Peter's disowning. He gave them a final commandment. He broke the bread and drank the wine.

After dinner, he will experience terrible anguish as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. Shortly after midnight, the soldiers will take him away to be questioned by Pilate. Around 3 pm tomorrow, Jesus will breathe his final breath on the cross. Three days later he will be resurrected.

As we take communion tonight, I think Jesus would love to be remembered as one might remember an old friend. Remember the sadness, the joy, and all the things in between. Most of all, as we remember Jesus, may we profess gratitude for the great gift he gave us, as we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.