

“Remember”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
Maundy Thursday – 24 March 2016  
I Corinthians 11:23-36; John 13:1-7, 31b-35

Paul wrote to a community in terrible conflict, full of arguments and rancor and probably some passive-aggressive behavior. They fought about everything, made claims of superiority based on who baptized them, disagreed on whether to eat meat offered to pagan idols, and especially on the right way to worship. Looking back with the benefit of nearly 2,000 years, we view their controversies with confusion and disdain. “What silly people,” we think, “to allow such trivial issues to bring them to the brink of breaking apart,” but what we see as silly, the Corinthians took as deadly serious, important enough to determine salvation from damnation.

Of course, we never quarrel, which makes it harder for us understand those crazy Corinthians. The Church models peace and tranquility, much like the world around us, where words of kindness consistently prevail over cruelty, and pettiness rarely rears its ugly head. Everyone agrees on the path to justice, the dignity of every human being, the perils of violence, the benefits of cooperation, the virtue of generosity over greed, the wisdom of contentment over envy, and the necessity of self-sacrifice for the common good. And when tempers flare, from time to time, reason and compassion readily emerge. People forgive and reconcile quickly and permanently. If only those poor Corinthians of years’ past could experience what we so enjoy.

Fortunately for them, Paul patiently and pastorally addressed their concerns, one by one, striving to provide them with context and perspective and peace, to prevent them from breaking each other’s hearts and the community of faith they shared, until he came to the topic of worship, where Paul played his trump card, repeating a teaching already known to them yet apparently neglected or forgotten.

Your unity, Paul reminded them, lies in a ritual meal, inaugurated by Jesus on the night of his betrayal. Your identity, your reality, resides in broken bread that symbolizes a broken Body, in wine that symbolizes blood poured out for you. Practice this meal with sincerity. Never take it for granted. Always remember what it means. Anchor your being in this sacred meal, and it will transform you, and you shall transcend your destructive pettiness and bickering, led to love one another as Jesus loves you, unconditionally and sacrificially; a renewed person, a new people, abiding in Jesus, with priorities shaped by his grace, not by your fears.

Oh, conflict will happen. The sin in us assures that, but communion promises us repentance and return, restoration from enmity to amnesty and amity. For nothing equals the power of the Body broken, nothing exceeds the life of the blood he shed. Remember that crucial offering, not merely in your minds, as you might recall a fond moment in the past. Instead dwell in a present moment of remembering, where that meal on that night truly happens once more, again and again, fresh and real; a remembering that heals the dismemberment you feel, reassembling you piece by piece until order emerges from the chaos of anger and insecurity, and Christ rescues you from isolation and binds you together in wholeness by his brokenness.

Accept with humble gratitude the agony, the tears and sweat that cleanse and quench thirst forever. Forsake the treason of sin. Forsake the way of the world, the unthinking brutality that hammers nail into flesh; that whips for amusement and mocks with a crown of thorns. Stop flogging each other with judgment and sharp remarks designed to cut and bruise. Stop mocking one another with arrogant claims of moral superiority and always being right. Grace, a most costly grace, stands ready to still your tongue and quiet your mind and create a dwelling in your heart for a Savior who guards and guides and keeps us from carelessly hurting people. Make a witness of mercy, or all of it means nothing, and hope dies on a lonely cross.

What a blessing for the Corinthians, dismembered by frustration and hatred, what a blessing that Paul called them to remember. What a blessing that this forceful claim, transmitted generation after generation, comes to us also, its present practitioners, resisting sin and a world at war, with a message of wounds received willingly so that all people might be made well; of humiliation suffered so that humility might bring perspective and peace; of a Body broken, a life taken, so that we might, in the midst of our alienation and dismemberment, remember. For Christ's sake, remember. Amen.