

Maundy Thursday

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The Rev. Ronald G. Abrams

Maundy Thursday 2020

The Gift of Remembering

It was one of the most powerful Easter moments I can remember. I had invited a recently retired former Rector, now a bishop, to return to assist with Easter services. As we were administering communion, I glanced over to see this faithful servant of God crying. Tears were streaming down his face as he turned away from the congregation. I immediately went over, not knowing what was wrong. Putting my hand on his shoulder I asked, "Are you okay?" His response was something I will never forget. He looked at me and barely able to get the words out of his mouth, said; "*Remembering is a powerful thing.*"

As we begin the journey this day, walking with Jesus through the last and holiest days of his life, it is important that as people of faith, we find good and appropriate ways to remember God's redeeming grace for our lives and for our turbulent, hurting world. Though we cannot gather physically this Maundy Thursday due to the pandemic that has invaded our creation, we can still be in spiritual communion with each other by taking time to remember! Let us not only take time to remember the gift of family, friends and community, let us remember the blessings God has bestowed upon us. Let us remember those suffering and in need this Holy Week.

Over my ministry one of the most common questions I get on this day is this: "*What does Maundy mean?*" In Latin, the word Maundy means "mandate" or "commandment." In the Gospel lesson appointed for this day (John 13: 1-17, 31-35) Jesus says: "*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Because Jesus' commandment to love reaches from bread and wine to the cross and beyond, it illumines for us how we should love and care for each other in the midst of our imperfect and tragically broken world. I believe though, there is another, more fundamental commandment found in the Maundy Thursday liturgy (Book of Common Prayer page 274) that is essential in order for Christ's love to be manifested in our lives. It is the commandment to remember.

Now Jesus is not talking about remembering where we put our car keys or our television remote. When our Lord picked up bread and wine and said, "*Do this in remembrance of me,*" he was trying to connect our lives to his, our salvation to his life and death.

When I was in seminary, Friday afternoons in the fall were spent playing a rough and tumble game of touch football at Trotter's Bowl on the grounds of Virginia Theological Seminary. After a week of classes and studying, it was a great way to relieve stress. During one game there was a

collision and I got my bell rung! A few of my classmates helped me to the sidelines, sat me down and asked if I was okay? After a long pause I said, *"I don't know where I am."* I had temporary amnesia! I couldn't remember anything for about an hour. In my heart, I had a feeling of isolation and fear, confusion and loss of identity. Though in the midst of a group of people, I felt totally alone and temporarily lost.

Contrast this isolation with another experience I had five summers ago. After 55 years, I was closing the door to my childhood home for the last time. It was time to sell my parent's home, the only home they ever owned. As I walked through each empty room by myself one more time, my mind and heart became abundantly full of wonderful remembrances of family and friends, the laughter and tears, the joys and sorrows of growing up there. As I locked the front door with tears streaming down my face, I couldn't help but feel gratitude and connection with my family in a deep and profound way. As my Bishop friend said, *"Remembering is a powerful thing."*

Isolation or connection? Forgetting or remembering? Bonded in union or broken into pieces? This is what Maundy Thursday is all about. It is a continuous remembrance of what God did in the Old Testament for the Israelites in the Passover story, and it is what God is doing for us in the Eucharist.

It is in our ability to remember the creation story when God said, *"It is good,"* that we understand our stewardship of planet earth. It is essential that we remember our roots where God encounters Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, offering them guidance and redemption, the fulfillment of God's eternal covenant with humanity. It is in remembering that holy night in Bethlehem when God became flesh and dwelt among us. It is in remembering Jesus' feeding the five thousand, healing the leper and raising Lazarus, that we remember the power of Jesus' love. It is in living into the scared liturgies of the next three days that our memories of God's mighty acts enable us to live into Christ's commandment to love one another, especially at difficult times like the one we are presently living through.

In 1972, the United Negro College Fund incorporated the motto: *"A mind is a terrible thing to waste."* It is an acute reminder that if we use our minds to remember, then we will always know who we are and to whom we belong. By doing so, we will never lose Christ's love in our hearts and actions.

When Jesus broke the bread and held the cup at the Last Supper – which was the first Eucharist – he said, *"Do this in remembrance of me."* Jesus was proclaiming to all who were gathered that holy evening and to us who are in our homes this day, that we are given a new commandment to love and hope in the midst of fear and despair, but only if with our hearts and minds we remember, for remembering is a powerful thing!

The Readings for Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

John 13: 1-17, 31-35