

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 “A Toast to Here & Beyond” Rev. Janet Chapman 10/5/25

Both my ex-husband and myself were preacher’s kids – this meant that we grew up going to church, there was never a choice. Being preacher’s kids, there were certain expectations – sit quietly, be respectful, try as hard as you can to pay attention. Likewise, our daughters went to church with the same expectations. Sometimes it worked and sometimes not. It probably wasn’t fair, but I often expected them to help with little tasks like picking up old bulletins, passing out new curriculum, bringing music to the choir loft. etc. But I also tried to honor them with special trips to the mall or for ice cream afterwards. I tried to teach them that being part of a faith community and taking care of various responsibilities was a cooperative team effort, not just the pastor’s job. A church is nothing without the people. Therefore, I appreciated the sentiment behind the story of a pastor who was well into his sermon when he noticed his young son up in the church balcony throwing little balls of paper onto the heads of people down below. The alarmed pastor was about to scold his son when the boy called out encouragingly, “Don’t worry, Dad; you just keep preaching, and I’ll keep them awake.” It is a team effort.

I was reminded of the gift of such a team during my time away after my mom’s death. People willingly stepped up to make sure tasks and ministry needs were covered. That is a memory I will hold onto for quite some time. My mom’s funeral was filled with memories relived like homemade holiday cinnamon rolls, huckleberry picking (the real dark purple kind), RV camping, and a deep love of animals. Memory is such a powerful thing. It tells us who we are. It not only locates us as individuals but as families and communities. The positive memories can reassure us about where we belong and the negative ones can provide direction as to where we want to be going. But memory is so fallible. We forget easily and what we remember is often flawed, missing important segments. There is a song in the Broadway musical “Gigi,” which exemplifies this. In “I Remember it Well,” a duet between Mamita and Honore, we see how memory can get distorted. Honore sings, “We met at nine,” Mamita responds, “We met at eight.” Honore – “I was on time.” Mamita – “No, you were late.” Honore –

“Ah yes, I remember it well, we dined with friends.” Mamita – “We dined alone.” “A tenor sang,” “A baritone.” “Ah yes, I remember it well – that dazzling April moon!” “There was none that night and the month was June.” “That’s right, that’s right.” Mamita says, “It warms my heart to know that you remember still the way you do.” Honore concludes, “Ah, yes, I remember it well.” You see, folks often have to correct our memories (especially as I get older), because unless you constantly recall something, it fades. “Ah yes, I remember it well, but I don’t really. Not unless I’m using that memory over and over.” Thus Moses tells the people of Israel with regards to remembering the Passover event, “This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; you will observe it in every generation as a sacrament for all time.” And so God’s deliverance of God’s people is made real year after year by the physical sharing of a meal and a story. And the memory never fades no matter what.

That is the backdrop for the Lord’s Supper that we celebrate every Sunday. It is a memory of Christ’s last meal, a Passover meal, which must never fade. In this practice, we are reminded of the significant shift Jesus makes the night before he is crucified, creating a new Passover. Paul writes of this new Passover saying “What I received, I also handed on to you.” This new Passover offers a remarkable liberation, a new saving action by God that goes beyond anything we could possibly imagine. It is like the lyrics of a song that prompt and stir our memories, so that we keep clear the distinction between what we actually remember and what we think we remember. Paul’s critics possibly experienced such a problem, confusing reality and memory, and thus challenged him saying, “You’ve got it all wrong, you’re confusing what we know to be true of Passover with the scandal of a crucifixion. That can’t be right!” But Paul is insistent – this is what the Lord said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” The meal they shared together in worship was meant to be far more than just supper, it was a meal of unity, yet it had become a sign of division.

We read at the beginning of Paul’s letter to Corinth, that Chloe’s people have given an oral report of the divisions going on in the church, and a lot of it revolves

around eating together. In the preceding verses to our text today, we read that those who have both their “own supper” and “homes to eat and drink in” are “going ahead” with their meals, while those who “have nothing” are “humiliated.” Some indulge themselves while others go hungry. Architecture of the time reveals that there were a certain number of elites who would sit in the inner circle of a home, the dining room if you will, while the riff raff was relegated to the leftovers out in the courtyard. It had gotten so bad that Paul didn’t even consider the meal they shared together to be the Lord’s Supper. He must remind them it was supposed to be a re-enactment of Jesus’ way of being with people of all kinds at the same table; it was a new way of being in community which Jesus had modelled in life and died to inaugurate for all. Yet within just one generation, the practice in Corinth had been distorted into a mockery of those values and became an opportunity for the elite to assert their privilege. Therefore, it is no wonder that when Paul brings up the tradition that started the meal off to begin with, he includes a stark reminder that this new way of being, of communing together, is quite fragile and could easily be forgotten.

A pupil once brought to the philosopher Hegel a passage of the philosopher’s writings and asked for an interpretation. Hegel studied it for awhile and finally replied, “When that passage was written, there were two of us who knew its meaning – God and myself. Now, alas, there is but one, and that one is God.” That is the danger of not engaging with a message, a practice, a sacrament enough that it stays fresh in our memory. Out of the mouths of babes come such truth, as nine year old Stephen was trying to practice his memory verse for Bible club, John 3: 16. Some of you know it, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Over and over Stephen practiced it, but his parents weren’t paying much attention until all of a sudden, his mom stopped and said, “Can you say that beginning part again, Stephen?” Stephen started over, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only forgotten son...” and both parents broke out in laughter. His only forgotten son...and therein is our stumbling block.

In my beloved memories of my mom, I remember how much I loved going out for a Wendy's frosty in Wichita, KS not long after Wendy's was founded, yeah that doesn't age me at all. No one had ever heard of such a thing – it was thicker than a milkshake with more chocolatey flavor. Dipping my French fries was my favorite thing... that sweet and salty combination. These days, I don't really want a Frosty, I just want the feeling I had... sitting with my parents spoon in hand (because straws were useless). I felt loved and safe and it got me thinking how often meals and memories get all tied up together. Meals tell stories of origins and hopes, of identity and sacrifice, of joy and love. Meals can take those memories and nurture them into dreams, into actions which ensure the values enacted at those meals are carried forward into the future and beyond. It is the same with our meal here in worship. Paul says that every time you do this, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again." The cross isn't to be recalled as an incident that happened a long time ago. It is to be proclaimed afresh every time the bread is eaten and the cup is drunk. Paul says it is a shared proclamation to be done in community with others, even a world-wide community like today. It is a kind of sermon we are all preaching by what we do together, as a team, in cooperation with one another. We are telling the world something important – not a sermon of words, but of deeds, of people caught up together bodily in a glorious performance of solidarity and hope that dares to reach beyond even death. We eat, we drink, but not just to or for ourselves. Perhaps we could imagine our sharing in the cup as the most profound of all toasts, a gesture that the partaking together points beyond itself, beyond our individual, limited ideas of what is possible. It is happening in this moment, but it is also a proclamation of the future, of what is beyond this moment. At our 60th anniversary, we lifted a cup to toast ourselves, the people who have lived and died bringing this community into existence, and the legacy of this church, but it was also a toast to God. This is what we practice not just on any given anniversary, but every time we gather for worship. We lift a toast to God, to God's dream for the world, to our life together as an anticipation of God getting everything God wants. We are proclaiming our deepest conviction – that God is real, that God has a dream for the world, and we pledge ourselves bodily to that dream in trust and hope. Cheers!