

Remembrance

Exodus 12: 12-20

Luke 22:14 - 20

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Exodus 12: 12-20

For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel.

On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

Luke 22:14 - 20

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Late on Christmas Eve in 1967 my Dad was a rookie police officer on patrol when a call came in that there was a house fire just blocks away from where he was. My Dad was the first one to arrive, the first to hear a woman on the lawn yelling that her baby was still in the house. My Dad ran in, and rescued the two year old boy who was suffering from smoke inhalation.

Every single Christmas after that, until my Dad passed away more than 40 years later, the family sent my Dad a simple gift and a heartfelt thank you note for the greatest Christmas gift they could have ever received. Each year the note was so emotionally written, so flowing with gratitude and appreciation, so filled with vivid details it was nearly impossible- except for the pictures of John growing up that were included- to tell that years, that decades, had gone by since

the young patrolman had come rushing out of a burning, smoke-filled home, coughing and wheezing as he handed a limp, barely breathing little boy to the now waiting EMT.

The remembrance of that terrifying night, the horrific memory of standing on their front lawn as they watched their home burn with their son still inside as each thought the other had scooped John up from his crib, the daring whispers of hope as they watched the police officer run inside the house, the anxious fears when rag doll John was carried out of the house and immediately given oxygen as he was placed in the waiting ambulance, and the Christmas joy and relief in a hospital emergency room when they knew that he would be alright, stayed fresh, clear and vivid in his parents' minds year after year. Each Christmas their holiday ritual included, "remember when." Each year they relived, re-experienced, the worst and the best Christmas they ever knew. Time never relegated any of that to the past for them, nor dimmed the extreme range of emotions.

The depth, the immersion, into the memories, of one of the most critical, most important, events in their lives, happened every year so that John's parents would never forget just what that long ago night looked like, felt like, sounded like, or even smelled like, nor would they forget, or become indifferent to how they had been cared for, how they had been blessed, and how their son had been rescued.

The importance of remembrance, of re-enacting, of telling this story through a shared history preserved and embodied all of this in an unbreakable sense of connection for the family, and with my Dad.

The importance of remembrance, of re-enacting, of telling *our* stories through a shared history preserves and embodies them in an unbreakable sense of connection for all of us whose faith story has ancient roots as enslaved captives in Egypt.

"This day shall be a day of remembrance for you," God had commanded the Israelites as God prepared to rescue and redeem them from Egyptian captivity. On the eve of the defining redemptive moment of Israel's history, God charged them with what became called 'Passover,' a festival of worship and reenactment, of worship and remembrance, for every generation to participate in. To be active in the remembrance is to be stirred, inspired and perhaps even humbled towards contemporary and compassionate action as we do not just hear the old, old story, we live, breathe and taste the old story anew. Our memories allow us to feel the pain of others' memories. When we participate in the remembrance we freshly see hope and promises fulfilled, so we know that there is hope for the future. The God who has redeemed us in the past will also redeem us in the future. To simply hear the story is not enough as memory, as remembrance, runs deeper just as God required. We are present in the original moment, regardless of the time and place we know.

"You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread....on the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance."

This is the meal, the festival, the command of God, that Jesus was celebrating with his disciples in a borrowed upper room for the Passover celebration, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here is where he gave thanks, broke bread, and blessed the cup, that was shared among his disciples. Here is where he remembered how God had redeemed the Israelites from persecution

and bondage, just as here is where he acknowledged that he was about to redeem all of humanity, that his body would be given. In the telling of the story, in the eating of the foods, Jesus and the disciples remembered this as if they were experiencing the 10 plagues, they were fleeing Egypt, and they were crossing the Red Sea. As they ate bitter herbs of affliction and poverty, the Exodus became a reality. As they sang songs of praise, they remembered the Almighty's guidance and mercy. As they shared the blessed bread and cup they were mandated to remember Jesus, to remember what happened before he was among them, what happened while he was with them, and what would happen because he was about to suffer and die, about to resurrect and redeem.

"Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus said to his disciples. "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus says to us. Do this, as often as you eat and drink so that we remain connected, so that we remain inspired and understanding, as time stands still when we gather at the Communion table. "Do this in remembrance of me," as these words draw us away from the now, from the everyday, as in the words of Erik Klobell, we receive "the meal that is my hope and my forgiveness." We share in the remembrance of Jesus through the meal that is our hope and our forgiveness.

Just as with our faith ancestors streaking sacrificial blood across our doorposts or reclining with Jesus at a Passover Seder on the night of betrayal, remembrance is our sacred responsibility. When we gather, even scattered to be gathered as we must do now, we remember how we have been redeemed. Our sacramental life, like a Passover Seder, is a physical, visceral, reminder of God's redemption, of the covenant of Jesus' redemption.

When we come to the table to eat the bread, to drink from the cup, and to remember Jesus, we relive and re-experience what time can never relegate to the past. To come to the table in remembrance means that we will never forget, nor become indifferent to how we have been cared for, how we have been blessed, and how we have been redeemed. Remember when. Amen.