

Brief Reflection on the Readings for Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020, Jane A. Beebe

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

This year what speaks to me most strongly is the word “remembrance.” The final verse of the reading from Exodus is: “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.” (Exodus 12:14) Paul, in 1 Corinthians, recalls Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper: ‘...The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me..."’ (1 Corinthians 11:24)

In order for something to be “remembered” it has to be stored somewhere in our hearts and minds. When we remember an event, we bring it to mind again. The beautiful narrative of the Last Supper is enshrined in our Eucharistic prayers. Some of us may have committed those prayers to memory. Jesus tells us that *whenever* we eat the bread or drink from the cup we are to remember Him. We are to remember Jesus’ teachings, prayers, and healings. Above all we are to remember Jesus’ love for us. We hear this in John’s beautiful words: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” There is no point in our existence, or in the existence of the world that Jesus has not loved us.

I am reaching that age (or *have* reached it if I am honest) where my memory can be a bit shaky. There are diseases that can severely compromise human memory. That is a tragedy and a loss, often causing great pain for the families and friends of such persons. However, the Feast of the Passover, and the Holy Eucharist are not celebrated alone; they are celebrated in community. No one of us must carry the whole memory of these extraordinary narratives on our own. Aren't family gatherings a time when we remember, when we share stories, funny or tragic, light-hearted or profound? Do we not fill in the blanks for each other when details are forgotten so that the story remains complete? My mother's grandmother lived with my mother's family at the end of her life. She kept a diary of daily events. It wasn't so much a private recording of personal details. It chronicled when someone came to visit, when it snowed, marriages, births, and deaths. When someone wondered, "Did it snow on Christmas last year?" She would smile and say, "Let me look that up..."

Jesus shares a meal with his disciples. Yet in the Gospel of John we see him as not only the welcoming host, but as the humble servant washing their feet. He gives a new commandment: "Love one another, *just as I have loved you.*" (John 13:34) We remember that now in our liturgy nearly every week, not as a dim memory, but as an event that keeps us alive, that renews our bonds of love. We can know in our *present* reality that Jesus has loved us, and does love us to the end. We

do it collectively so that no one person must recall the whole story. We are woven into that story; it is our story. Like the early disciples, we have companions on the way. A companion is literally ‘one who breaks bread with another.’ There is a way in which the Eucharist takes place whenever we break bread with one another, yet most especially when we have love for one another, when we are *companionable*.

I have a memory from my years serving as a Eucharistic Minister in my home parish. A young person (who remains dear friend) decided to be baptized about a dozen years ago. She had graduated from one of the Five Colleges and had remained in Amherst to work for a time while figuring out next steps. She was drawn to my church from a growing need to have a worshipping community. A former professor she much admired was a member of our church, and available to answer her questions. She also asked to have coffee with me to find out about my own faith journey, and (after about four hours!) we became good friends. I was not her official sponsor, but we have continued to share a lot over the years about our respective life journeys.

My memory of serving her wine at her first communion is special to me—although I did not know it was her first at the time. The movement of the Spirit was so clear in the moment she received the chalice and drank from it. It was as if time stopped. I felt so privileged to witness the presence of the Divine; it became another conversion moment for me as well. I know we both cried after the service

was over and she had told me what had happened. She ended up going to law school, then passing the bar, getting married, (and adopting a dog) all in the same summer! She is now working as a juvenile public defender in Atlanta, an amazing ministry and grounded in a strong sense of call. She has a particular empathy for and understanding of young teenagers, serving as a Sunday school teacher for middle schoolers.

In this most holy of times, it is difficult to be apart. Yet I hope you all are finding ways in which you can recall to memory the details of your shared life together. There is a wonderful verse from Jeremiah that appears as one of the short bits of Scripture in the service of Compline. The people are suffering in a great drought. Yet Jeremiah is able to affirm this:

“Yet you, O LORD, are in the midst of us,
and we are called by your name;
do not forsake us!” (Jeremiah 14:9)

May it be so.