

*“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you...”,* declares the book of Exodus, after describing in exacting detail how the people are to celebrate the Passover. *“Do this in remembrance of me”,* says Jesus, after taking, blessing, breaking and sharing the bread and the wine at the Passover meal with his disciples on the night before he is arrested. *“I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you...that our Lord Jesus said ‘This is my body that is for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this in remembrance of me’”,* writes Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth.

The word “remember” comes from the Late Latin *rememorari*, meaning to be mindful of. To remember, then, is to bring something back to mindfulness. The Hebrew in the Exodus passage is *zakar*, whose meaning is essentially the same. And the Greek in the New Testament is *anamnesko*, which means “to deliberately recollect in order to better appreciate the effects or intended results of what happened.”

So you see, this idea of intentional, thoughtful practice of remembrance lies deep in the DNA of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is what we are about throughout the church year as we gather Sunday after Sunday to remember our story through the reading of our Scriptures and to remember our deliverance through the celebration of Holy Eucharist.

And why do we do this? Because we believe that our communal remembering not only shapes us; it also transforms us.

How that actually works has, for centuries, been a subject of deep interest to far greater minds than mine. During my last year in seminary, in New York, I took a deep dive into the question of how the practice of remembrance that takes place when we share Eucharist is thought to work on us. Twenty-five pages later I had only scratched the surface; but I did learn a couple of things that have stayed with me. That I’d like to share them with you tonight.

The first has to do with Palestinian Judaism. It is said that in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus is always either on his way to a meal, at a meal, or has just left a meal! Table fellowship, which was a staple of Jewish life, was, for Jesus, a kind of enacted parable of God’s beloved community. Everyone was invited; there were all kinds of people there, people who were being knit together as they shared food and drink

It was the tradition in that culture that a blessing always be said at the beginning of the meal. And it was the understanding in that tradition that when you consumed what had been blessed, you were partaking of the blessing that had been said over it. So, if the blessing remembers, if it brings to mindfulness God’s saving activity – past, present and yet to come – then everyone at the table, whether it is a Passover Seder or the

Holy Eucharist, everyone is drawn into the experience of shared remembering. And is making their own what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will yet do.

The second thing I learned has to do with the effect that repeating, over time, this “doing in remembrance” can have on you or me. The idea is that when we are part of a community that is bringing to mind what God has done, whether it is the passing over and deliverance of the ones whose homes were marked by lambs’ blood in Egypt, or the binding together of disciples into Christ’s body in the world, we are not observing those events from a distance. Rather, we are *engaging* with these stories, individually and as a community. And our engagement with them affects us.

We experience, we reflect on and assimilate our experience, and then we come back and participate in remembering again. And again. It’s an iterative process that works on us over time, incrementally. It actually does change the way we think. and by extension, who we are. You could say it converts us.

So that all sounds good, right? Maybe kind of theoretical, though. I mean, what difference do a couple of things I learned, in a class I took 20 years ago called *The Soteriology of Eucharistic Prayer*, really make for all of us here tonight?

Well, if I may, I’d like to suggest two takeaways from this time of bringing to mind the origin story of our Eucharist. Of deliberately recollecting so as to better appreciate the effects or intended results of what happened.

So the first takeaway would be the knowledge that whenever you and I come to this table, no matter where we are coming from, we are “in”. By that I mean that the blessing of God that is offered at the beginning of this holy meal, for all that God has done, is doing, and will do, includes all of us. Because we share in the bread and the cup.

No matter how much you or I might, from time to time, feel distant from it, we are never just onlookers. We have been made participants in the story. And that’s something to keep in mind when we share meals at home, too, and we offer a blessing at the beginning.

And the second takeaway would be an expectation that our experience and our understanding of what is going on here is going to keep evolving over time. This practice of remembrance is a kind of conversation between us, and God, and our community, and our understanding, of what we are doing and why we do it.

We don’t have to totally “get it”. In fact, if we think we do, we are probably wrong.

Because what we are doing here together is leaning into a mystery. We are choosing to be present to something beyond our understanding; and inviting it to change us. And we are opening ourselves to what might take place in us tonight, or tomorrow, or this Sunday, or next year.

As we keep coming together. As we keep doing these things. As we keep remembering.