

The St. John's Pulpit

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A STORY CALLED 'REMEMBER ME'

Luke 22;7-21

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 12, 2016
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The home was filled with noise and chatter. Children were running around furniture and teenagers were singing in the basement. Adults were preparing the meal. A couple of younger men went to the garage and brought in a full sheet of felt-covered plywood placing it atop the family dining table allowing everyone to be at one table. They covered it with three table cloths and arranged the place settings around the flowers cut from the garden. Then came the call and everyone found their chair.

There was one person at the table who was new – well, new again. This person had not been at this table for a few years. He had caused the family a great deal of pain and heartache. He looked around at everyone else with his mind fixed on his failures and regrets and thought, “*I don't belong here.*” Then, the matriarch of the family nodded to the patriarch and together they stood saying to the entire family, “*Before we offer our prayer of thanksgiving to God for this meal, we need to give one piece of instruction. Now, y'all know how to pass the food and serve one another. But, we need to say one piece of instruction to Uncle Leo, 'Leo, welcome home. Your yesterdays do not need to determine your tomorrows. Put both of your feet under this table. You belong here. Look around you. This is your family!'*”

As you know, stories are central to faith. Jesus was a storyteller. His stories are called *parables*; a Greek compound word bringing together *bole* (to throw) and *para* (alongside). One-third of Jesus' teachings in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Synoptic Gospels, are parables. If you want to begin understanding Jesus, study the stories he threw alongside human life to help you understand God's will for living. Jesus' parables are 'Stories to Live By' indeed.

When Jesus took his seat at the table on the evening of the Day of Unleavened Bread, echoes of bleating sheep were fresh throughout Jerusalem. All day long, sheep had been slaughtered; not because of animal cruelty or religious violence, but due to sacrificial commitment. Jesus told his disciples, “*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...*” Can you imagine what they must have felt when Jesus told them that he was secretly eagerly desiring to sit with them at this table? Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered himself in sacrificial commitment for the salvation of all people.

In Luke's story, there are two cups mentioned. Prior to breaking the bread, Jesus took a cup and asked the disciples to divide it among themselves as they passed it around the table. All twelve disciples were still in the Upper Room at that point. Consider the hands who touched that first communion cup.

Jesus handed the cup to John, the beloved disciple who would be present at the cross the next day. John's hands would hold Jesus' mother and teach the early Church how to love one another. John poured a bit of the fruit of the vine into his own cup and passed Jesus' cup into the hands of Simon the Zealot who was so fervently committed to his religious views that he wanted Jesus to lead a revolt to overthrow the Roman Empire. Simon the Zealot poured a bit of the fruit of the vine into his cup and handed the cup to Simon Peter who would deny even knowing Jesus three times before breakfast and then hear Jesus say to him "*feed my sheep*" and hold in his hands the care of the Jerusalem Church. Simon Peter poured a drink of the fruit of the vine into his own cup and then passed the cup to Matthew who had handled the monies of the Roman Empire. As a tax collector, Matthew's hands knew the ethical and moral temptations of cheating, stealing and manipulating people who were poor for the sake of selfishness and greed. Matthew poured a bit of the fruit of the vine into his own cup and then passed the cup into the hands of Thomas who would later place his hand upon the wounds of Jesus. Thomas poured a bit of the fruit of the vine into his own cup and remembered Jesus saying, "*I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me as I abide in you.*" Thomas passed the cup into the hands of Judas whose hands would soon hold thirty pieces of silver. And after the cup had touched the hands of each apostle, Jesus lifted a loaf of bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying, "*This is my body, which is given for you. DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.*"

Jesus was a storyteller. The Passover meal is a retelling of the story of God delivering Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Jesus used Passover as a parable that retold every one of Jesus' other stories. When Jesus takes in his hands the cup and the bread of the Passover meal, you catch a glimpse of a loving father waiting for a son to return home; a Samaritan stopping for one who is wounded; a seed growing secretly; a friend helping a neighbor at midnight; and laborers being treated fairly and paid graciously without attention to their time cards. Jesus threw the Passover meal alongside the human need for nourishing the vision of God's deliverance from the bondage of sin. In the Passover meal, Jesus offered new meaning to the fruit of the vine, which symbolizes freedom and salvation, and to the bread, which symbolizes daily provisions of The Living Providential God.

Today, the cup that passed from Jesus' hands to the disciples passes to you. A little bit of the fruit of the vine and a piece of the broken loaf will be in your hands. You know how to pass the plates of crumbs and cups. But Jesus knew it would be easy for you to forget the message of the Passover. So, Jesus said, "*Whenever you do this, remember me.*" Today, we remember Jesus at the table with his disciples; praying in Gethsemane, hanging on the cross; and risen from the dead. We remember Jesus' parables. And, we remember Jesus touching the outsiders, forgiving the one caught in a sinful act, challenging the influential, and leading a woman to find living water at a well. Each of them is present at this Lord's Table each time we remember Jesus.

God gives you this bread today to remind you of God's daily provisions. Like daily manna along the journey, God provides for you each day in the body of Christ. As you live in relationship with Jesus, God's salvation flows through you like fruit on a vine. So, friends of God, '*Welcome home. Your yesterdays do not need to determine your tomorrows. Put both of your feet under this table. You belong here. Look around you. This is your family!*' AMEN!