

Sermon – Teaching our Children to Remember
Sunday, September 10, 2017
Scripture - Exodus 12:1-14, Romans 13:8-14
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Our first reading is Exodus 12:1-14. Following Moses' encounter with Yahweh at the burning bush, he returns to Egypt to set his people free. Today's reading provides intimate details to the Passover meal which will protect them from the final plague God sent to Egypt before the crossing of the Red Sea. Through the years, this religious and liturgical Passover meal shared in homes commemorates God's liberation in Jewish history. Today we celebrate the sacrament of communion; a liturgical meal commemorating our liberation in Christ which has its roots in the Passover meal. In this worship experience we remember together and in our remembering we are nurtured and renewed in God's grace. Hear now, the word of God.

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴ If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.

Our second reading is Romans 13:9-14. Following teachings on the Christian's civil responsibilities to pay taxes and remain debt free, Paul reminds the believers that one debt they will never be free from is the debt of love. The closing verses of this chapter are significant in the history of the Church. The influential Church Father, Augustine who was tormented by his life of debauchery found himself in prayer one day. He heard a child's voice from a nearby house say "Take and read." In response, he opened his Bible to this passage. In his Confessions, he writes "*with the very ending of the sentence, it was as if a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.*" Hear now God's Holy Word.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Amen.

The title of the meditation: Teaching our Children to Remember

The Text: This day shall be a day of remembrance for you...throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. Exodus 12:14

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, we thank you for the gift of memory. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

On Friday I joined 30 Presbyterian Women for lunch in Parish Hall as we began another year of creating memories together. Mary Ray provided a delicious meal from Westminster's classic Second Helpings Cookbook. What made the meal even more delicious was that it was the recipe of Mary's mother, Doris Ray, and Mary created the meal in honor and in memory of her beloved mom who prepared many meals through the years for Westminster. Food is an integral part of our gatherings of faith and memories around food nourish our spirits.

As stories and memories were shared around the tables, one interaction seemed especially relevant for this meditation on remembering. Nancy Scott shared a story about an older, loving couple who were enjoying an evening in their home. The husband asked his wife to get him a bowl of ice cream. He said to her, "Now, I don't want you to forget this so write it down." She said, "That's ridiculous, I can remember a bowl of ice cream." However he persisted, "Now I want some chocolate sauce on that ice cream, so you'd better write it down. She said, "I am not writing this down, I can remember." He said again. "Additionally, I would like a red cherry—please write it down." She shook her head and went into the kitchen to make his bowl of ice cream.

A little while later, she returns to the family room and presents him a plate of buttered toast. With a look of annoyance, he shakes his head and says to her. "And where's the jam?"

Today we gather to recognize the gift of memory and the role it plays in sustaining and deepening our faith. We are grateful for the commotion on this Sunday as we begin a new year of teaching our children to remember. What greater gift do we have to give our children? We want them to remember the stories of our faith, yes, and we want them to taste and smell and feel God's love in their lives. Furthermore, we want them to witness the love of Christ in our lives and we hope and pray that the memories created at Westminster will sustain and strengthen them throughout their faith journeys.

The term *sticky faith* is defined by researchers at Fuller Youth Institute as faith that is "part of one's inner thoughts and emotions and is also externalized in choices and actions that reflect this faith commitment." It is a faith that "celebrates God's specific care for each person . . . in the global and local community of the church" and that "shows marks of spiritual maturity but is also in the process of growth." It is this kind of sticky faith that we want to develop in our children and youth, for it is this kind of faith that becomes a way of life, capable of influencing people's everyday decisions as well as their interactions with the world around them. ("Sticky Faith: What Keeps Kids Connected to Church" by Jen Bradbury *Christian Century* (May 17, 2013).

The research done at the Youth Institute of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, my alma mater, offers insight into ways to teach our children to remember. As parents we need to be authentic in sharing our own faith with our children, and open to talking about life events

to make faith relevant. In the midst of natural disasters, what do these events reveal about God and what difference does it make to be people of faith?

Likewise, we need to welcome difficult questions and doubt. Rather than be afraid, let us see these conversations as an opportunity for deepening our relationships and a natural rhythm in the ebb and flow of growing up. None of us has all the answers and need not pretend we do. The memory of a hug and affirmation rather than a lecture will make that faith stick. The memory of working side by side to repair or build a home for the poor will make that faith stick. The memory of praying for our brothers and sisters facing natural disasters, collecting and personally delivering much needed supplies, or sending financial aid to support those on the ground will make that faith stick. The memory of sharing a ritual inter-generational meal around tables of fellowship will make that faith stick like peanut butter and jam on our fingers.

The faith we hope to teach our children to remember at Westminster is respectful, kind, thoughtful, risking in love, and able to forgive as we are forgiven. None of us is perfect and need not pretend we are, however let us seek to live honorable lives and to owe no one anything except to love one another.

As we prepare to come to the communion table and partake together in the meal that has been prepared, we do so in remembrance of Christ.

Henri Nouwen writes in The Living Reminder: *To remember is not simply to look back at past events, more importantly, it is to bring these events into the present and celebrate them in the here and now...It is central to the biblical tradition that God's love for God's people should not be forgotten. Through memory, love transcends the limits of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives.*

May our children grow up with meaningful and life changing memories in this faith community, which nourish, sustain and offer hope at any moment in their lives. This day shall be a day of remembrance for us! Thanks be to God. Amen.