

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 24:1-12

April 4, 2021

Easter Sunday

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE TODAY

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

On Thursday, April 8 at 11:00 a.m., the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum will host a virtual event as part of the annual “Days of Remembrance” approved by the U.S. Congress. National and international remembrance events are scheduled throughout this week of April 4-11. In a video called “Why We Remember the Holocaust” on the museum’s website, the importance of remembering is explained by:

Estelle Loughlin, a Holocaust survivor: “Memory is what shapes us. Memory is what teaches us. We must understand that’s where our redemption is.”

Lt. Colonel Terrance Sanders, U.S. Army: “Looking back allows us to understand how important it is for us to serve in a country where we have the strength and the might and the will to defend those that are defenseless.”

Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig, Washington Hebrew Congregation: “So Days of Remembrance is an opportunity for us to remember the suffering that was and the efforts that were made to put an end to such suffering, and it’s a call to conscience today in our world to make sure that we aren’t the silent ones standing by, contributing to the suffering of others.”¹

Remembrance, then, is more than just recalling past events out of interest or curiosity. Remembrance runs much deeper than just an intellectual recounting of historical happenings. Remembrance involves looking to the past in order to learn how to live in the present and hope for the future.

Here’s a great illustration of “remembrance.” It’s from a book by Laurence Hull Stookey about the Lord’s Supper, when Jesus told his disciples (and still tells us), “Do this in remembrance of me.” Stookey says, “Suppose someone were to say to you, ‘Remember your high school graduation.’ Likely you would say, ‘Now, I’m going to have to think about that for a few minutes. Please give me some undisturbed peace and quiet. . . Let’s see, I can picture the building where it was held. My whole family was there, and it was crowded. I have no idea what the graduation speaker said, but I do remember going up to the platform to receive my diploma. Now what else can I remember? Oh yes, we had a nice party afterward.’ This is our accustomed way of ‘remembering.’ But if you ‘remembered’ after the fashion of the ancient Hebrews . . . you would do something quite different. Challenged to remember your high school graduation, you would rent a cap and gown. Clad therein, with great dignity and pride you would walk across a room while a recording of ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ played. Having previously engaged a caterer, you would throw a party for your friends. For most twentieth-century Christians, remembering is a solitary experience involving mental recall. But for ancient Jews and early Christians (the first of whom were all

Jews) remembrance was a corporate act in which the event remembered was experienced anew through ritual repetition. To remember was to do something, not to think about doing something.”

Today is a Day of Remembrance. Easter is not just an annual celebration of some historical event 2000 years ago. To paraphrase Holocaust survivor Estelle Loughlin, our Easter memory is what shapes us. Our Easter memory is what teaches us. We must understand that’s where our redemption is.

When the two men in dazzling clothes met the women at the tomb on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” The two men weren’t just relaying hard facts. They were bringing Good News, the gospel. Then, Luke tells us, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them “remembered his words.” When they remembered, they believed! The empty tomb didn’t prove anything to them, except that Jesus’ body wasn’t where they expected it to be – and that caused them to be perplexed. But remembering Jesus’ words opened their eyes and opened their hearts to the possibilities of a brand-new future. As Stookey wrote, “To remember was to do something, not to think about doing something.” When the women remembered, they were commissioned, and they hurried to share the good news with the eleven and all the rest.

This past week has been “Days of Remembrance” for Christians and Jews around the world, as people of faith have celebrated Holy Week and the Festival of the Passover at the same time. As we gather at the Lord’s Table this morning, we remember Jesus sharing the bread and cup with his disciples as they celebrated the Passover meal. Jewish believers today still observe the ritual of the Seder meal, in which they act out the story of Passover. It is a celebration of God liberating his people from slavery in Egypt. As the meal is shared around the table, the story is told. But it’s not just ancient history that is shared; it is told in the first person. The children are taught and the adults are reminded, “We commemorate Passover tonight because of what God did for us when we went out of Egypt” (even if the story is being told in April 2021).

As Jesus sat at the table with his disciples and celebrated the Passover, “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.’” (Luke 22:19) And so we remember Jesus’ death during Holy Week. But today we also celebrate his victory over sin and death through his resurrection. Even though we remember Jesus’ death every time we break bread and drink from the cup, the Lord’s Supper is not a memorial meal honoring a dead hero from the past. Instead, we enjoy communion with one another and with our risen, living Lord Jesus Christ. And we look to God’s future when we will “eat and drink at Christ’s table in Christ’s kingdom.” (Luke 22:30)

When we gather around the Lord’s table, we remember what Jesus did for us during the Passover celebration 2,000 years ago and we include ourselves in the story. We might say, “We commemorate Easter because of what God did for us when he raised Jesus from the dead.” As Easter people, we are called to remember what God has

done in the past. In God's past with God's people, including us, we learn how to live for today and we find our hope for the future. If anything, Easter is a celebration of the amazing new thing God has done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. However, God's new thing is not just a thing of the past. In fact, the power of Christ's resurrection is always breaking into our lives and guiding us. It is true that at Easter we remember the past so we can live into God's future.

When I was a teenager, how many times did my parents say to me, as I walked out the door, "Remember who you are and where you come from"? Obviously, they didn't just mean "Remember your name and where you were born." They wanted that knowledge and my identity to make a difference and to guide what I did. To remember was to do something, not to think about doing something.

As we come to the Lord's table on this Easter Sunday, we do this in remembrance of him. When we break the bread and drink the cup, we aren't just recalling that night in the upper room in Jerusalem during the Festival of the Passover 2000 years ago. When we remember by breaking the bread and drinking the cup, we are doing something. We are part of God's ongoing story. We are commissioned to live as God's people who have been redeemed and given new life because of what God has done for us in raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

As we celebrate Easter and break the bread and drink the cup, it's as if we hear Jesus saying to us (again), "Remember who you are and where you come from." And when we remember that we are Easter people, we find courage to live for today and hope for God's future.

Happy Easter!

Let us pray: Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation, to you be praise and glory forever. As once you ransomed your people from Egypt and led them to freedom in the promised land, so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son. The resurrection of your Son has given us new life and renewed hope. Help us to live as new people of the resurrection. Grant us wisdom to know what we must do, the will to want to do it, the courage to undertake it, the perseverance to continue to do it, and the strength to complete it; through our risen Lord Jesus Christ, who makes all things new. Amen.

NOTES

¹ www.usmmm.org/remember/days-of-remembrance/resources/why-we-remember

² Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 28.