

## **“Do You Remember?”**

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I Corinthians 11:17-29

Have you ever been reading the newspaper, a magazine or a book and as you turn the page one word among all of the others just kind of jumps off the page and you notice that one word more than any other? This past week I was reading the *Tulsa World*—I think it was the second section; I was looking at the front page of the section and when I turned the page, one word, a name, jumped off the page and caught my attention. It is a name that won't mean much to most of you, but to the preachers who are present this morning, you will recognize the name. The name was Buttrick. It was in the obituary section. A man from Tulsa, 84-year-old G. Robert Buttrick, had died.

The reason the name meant so much to me is because a man by the name of George Buttrick was known as one of the greatest preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have a series of books in my office titled “Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching.” The preachers from the very beginning of the church who have contributed most to the life of the church are listed in these volumes. There are maybe 8-10 persons in each volume. In a volume from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among other names that you would recognize, the name George Buttrick is included. I got out that volume and read some of the things about George Buttrick.

He had lived in England and moved to this country. He was a Presbyterian; he served one or two Presbyterian churches before he moved to Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. He then taught in two different seminaries. In the obituary, it said Buttrick, G. Robert, and then on down in the obituary it said, son of Agnes Gardner and George A. Buttrick. I still wasn't sure it was the same man until I read down farther into the obituary and, listed among the survivors, was a brother named David Buttrick, from Nashville. David Buttrick I knew to be the son of George Buttrick. He teaches at Vanderbilt. I have read many of his books and other things that he has written.

This incident reminded me of another name that I saw recently in the obituaries. The man's name was unimportant, but what caught my attention, however, was his nickname. The man's name was Charles Covington,

but when his name was listed in the obituaries, it read Charles “Coon Dog” Covington. Don’t you wonder about Charles “Coon Dog” Covington? Did he sell coon dogs? Was he a coon hunter? Or maybe Charles Covington was just kind of a coon dog kind of guy.

After the first service, you will not believe how many people came out the door and told me about some favorite nickname of theirs. One man said that when he was in the army a friend of his had his name legally changed to “Coon Dog.” It’s not the same man I read about, but it was interesting to me how many people after the first service came up and said, “I have this nickname that is interesting. “One of the saintly women in our church came out the door and said, “My nickname is Baby Doll.”

If you had asked me a few years ago in my younger, faster, days what my favorite nickname would be for myself, I might have said something like “Hot Rod,” or “Lead Foot.” I used to like to drive cars really fast. These days you should probably just call me “Geritol” or something.

As a Christian, have you ever thought about what your nickname might be? Our gospel lesson today suggests that a good name for us as Christians would be “Mustard Seed.” That’s a good name for a Christian. In the gospel lesson, it seems that for once the Disciples finally get it. Remember, they were often so slow. Jesus would teach a lesson and they would go out and do just the opposite. Remember that crucial time in the ministry of Jesus when things were kind of coming down and it looked like things were falling apart? James and John came to Jesus and asked for a seat of honor in his kingdom. Who’s the greatest? They just didn’t get it most of the time, but this time they got it. Jesus had taught a lesson about forgiveness. He said if someone sins against you and they come to you and repent of their sin, you must forgive them. The Disciples understood how difficult this would be and so they said to Jesus, “Then increase our faith if we have to do that.” And Jesus said, “If you have as much faith as a tiny mustard seed, just a speck of faith, that’s all you need.

I want you to do something a little different this morning. If you would, get out your bulletin and get a pen or a pencil. I want you to write something down. Somewhere, if you can find a blank space on the bulletin, write down the words, “mustard seed faith.” In other words, Jesus is saying to us, “It’s not the *quantity* of your faith that matters, it is the *quality* of your faith that matters. If your faith is in the living Christ, that’s all you need—just a speck a tiny seed—a mustard seed of faith.

Now, if you would, write down “mustard seed faith” and then draw an

arrow from “mustard seed faith.” Then write the word “trust.” If you have “mustard seed faith” you can “trust” God no matter what happens. When the inevitable storms of life arise—the struggles, the obstacles, the challenges that we all face, if you have “mustard seed faith” you can “trust” in God that God will help you through those times.

Now, if you will, draw another arrow from the word “trust” and write another word, “confidence.” “Mustard seed faith” leads to “trust” that leads to “confidence”—the kind of confidence that enabled the Apostle Paul to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

A woman by the name of Donna Sinclair has written some words that are an important counter note for us to hear about mustard seed faith. She speaks for all of us I think. She said, “Most of the time I do pretty well. I believe in God. I trust God. I feel assured of God’s love, but then something happens and all of a sudden I begin to doubt.” She says, “That’s when I go to church and hear God’s ‘yes.’”

Have you ever thought about how sad it is for some people to go to their church and never hear the word, “yes” from God? That’s what the Table says to us. It is God’s “yes” for us. It is the “yes” we *all* need to hear so much. It is the “yes” that God gives to us through the gift of Christ.

There is a segment within the church that says “no” to the world. You’ve heard them; you’ve watched them on television; you’ve read the books they write. They are consumed and obsessed with end times. “Left behind.” “You’re gonna be left behind.” Their word from God is not “yes,” but “no.” This Table says to us that the end of things is not divine destruction but holy communion with God.

I want you to write down one more word. Draw another arrow from the word “confidence” and write down the word “remember.” The Table reminds us that Christ died for us. When you hold the cup this morning or when you dip the bread in the Chalice, I hope you will remember that Christ died for you. It is one thing to say Christ died for the world. It is another thing altogether to say, “Christ died for me.” It is one thing to say, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. . .” It is something altogether different to say, “For God so loved me that he gave his only son.”

The Table helps us to remember that Christ died for us, But there is something else—three of the most remarkable words in the New Testament. These words of Jesus are the earliest recorded words we have in the New Testament. The epistles were written before the gospels. These words in 1 Corinthians are the earliest recorded words of Jesus that we

have in the Bible. Jesus said, “This is my body for you. When you do this, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Until he comes—not just at the end of time but until he comes to us today. When we come to the Table we share communion not only with each other but with the living Christ here in our midst among us.

Most importantly, I believe, the Table helps us to remember this: The Table helps us to remember who we are. Did you know that, as your minister, it is not my job to tell you what to do, so much as it is to remind you who you are. Today I remind you that you are the People of the Table. This affects all areas of our lives. It makes a difference in the kind of spouse, the kind of parent, the kind of son or daughter, the kind of employee, the kind of friend we are because we are People of the Table. The challenge of the Table is to live up to your name. Live up to your name as a person of the table.

I suppose if I could choose any name, any nickname to be included in my obituary, it might be the nickname, “Grape Juice.” Kipp “Grape Juice” Wolfe. I would know that you People of the Table understand what that means. It means that this Table is at the center of our faith. Did you notice how the Sanctuary is arranged? If you go into the sanctuaries of some churches, the pulpit is in the center of the Sanctuary. It is no accident that in our sanctuary it is the Table that is in the center of the Sanctuary because the Table, and all it represents, is at the center of our faith.

Some of the best words—maybe the best words I have ever read outside of the Bible about communion are by a man named Errol Smith. He said,

“Well, it’s World Communion Sunday. We are at the table of the Lord, the table of forgiveness—the table where we can begin all over again. We can walk up here or through life angry or guilty, or even tired and sad. But we don’t have to walk away from here or through life angry or guilty, or even tired and sad. God makes it possible. ‘Come unto me. Your sins are forgiven.’ That’s how the preacher invites us. God’s love can do it any day, And God intends to do it today at this table. What better news for you and me to claim, To feel in our bones, and to pass along. because we had the divine privilege of experiencing it first hand right here. Good news! Good food! Good God!”

Amen.