

“Thanks for Remembering”

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

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“When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad, I simply remember my favorite things and then I don’t feel so bad.” We have come this weekend to remember some of my favorite things. My task is made easier because I am speaking to you about two of my favorite things, the church and communion.

This is a weekend for remembering. This holiday is set aside primarily to remember those who have given their lives in service for our country. It has come to mean more than this. We remember family members, friends, church family members who also have died. This is a weekend for remembering.

One of my earliest memories was going to a little country cemetery in a little town of southeastern Kansas called Buffalo. It is the place where my father was raised as a boy. We would go to that cemetery and family members would decorate the headstones that were there in the cemetery. Later I returned to that cemetery for the burial of my father’s parents, my grandparents.

I remember this happening, though, on those Memorial Day weekends. While the adults were in the cemetery somewhere decorating headstones or maybe even attending a service, my brother and I had gotten the keys to the car and we had turned on the radio and were listening to a radio broadcast of the Indianapolis 500. Along those lines, I have a prediction for you. In fact, after church if you want to call your brother-in-law or your mother-in-law or whoever and make a bet, I’ll promise you’ll win. The prediction is this: the winning car of the race today will be a Honda. Now think about this great tradition of America and the winning race car will be a Honda. Do you know how I know that to be so? Every car in the race today is powered by a Honda engine. What a great country, isn’t it?

When I was a young boy, I didn’t understand the importance of the weekend and of remembering. Jesus certainly understood; in those last hours with those closest to him, the one thing he said to them was “Remember me.” My favorite author said, “When Jesus said, ‘Do this in remembrance of me,’ he was doing more than prescribing a slug of

nostalgia.” He was saying to us, not only, “Remember all that I have done for you,” but, “Remember that I will be with you.”

It is a sure thing, as sure as a Honda winning the Indianapolis 500 today, that when we have the communion service this morning, the living Christ will be present with us. That’s a sure thing. We can count on that.

Jesus said for us to remember to remind us of giving thanks. The literal meaning of the word “Eucharist,” is “gratitude” or “grace.” We come to the table to give thanks but maybe not always with the proper attitude.

Have you seen Larry King interviewed in the past few days? He has released an autobiography. I believe the title of the book is, “My Remarkable Journey.” I’ve heard him interviewed several times and there was something always interesting about his life. One interviewer, though, said “Tell us a story.” Larry is famous for storytelling; so he said, “One day a grandmother took her grandson to the beach to go swimming. The boy swam out into the ocean and got out farther than he thought he was and started struggling. The grandmother hollered to the lifeguard, ‘Save him! Save him! The lifeguard dived into the ocean and swam out to the boy. Just as the boy was going under the water, the lifeguard grabbed the boy, brought him back on the beach, gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and revived him. The grandmother said, ‘He’s alive! He’s alive! Thank God, thank God, thank God!’ Then she looked up to heaven and said, ‘He had a hat!’” How often have you come to this table thinking, maybe even blaming God for all you don’t have instead of thanking God for what all God has already given to you.

The table is a time to give thanks and remember that we can live without fear. That’s not easy to do these days. There’s a lot in our world that can frighten us. I know some people are afraid to go to certain places in Tulsa maybe in the middle of the day, let alone at night, because they are afraid. It seems other people try to frighten us. Some politicians, to promote a particular political agenda, try to frighten those who will listen.

We even see that in other areas. There is a local television station that when it advertises its weather program says this, “Keeping you and your family safe.” Now think about it. Out of 365 days in a year we might have a handful of days where there is dangerous weather. Yet

their slogan year around, on sunny, bright, days is “Keeping you and your family safe.”

One thing we can remember when we come to the table is that no thing or no one will ever separate us from God’s love. We do this strangely, Paul said, not by proclaiming the teachings of Christ, the miracles of Christ, or even the resurrection of Christ, but by proclaiming the death of Christ. When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I’m feeling sad, I simply remember. I remember the cross.

When we come to the table, we remember to examine ourselves. Paul says if we don’t do that, if we don’t examine ourselves and discern the body we receive the cup and the bread in an unworthy manner. When we come to the table, we remember broken promises. Promises we have made even to God.

In an old Burt Reynolds’ movie I hadn’t thought of in several years until I was working on this sermon, called “The End,” Burt Reynolds, a hypochondriac, had received news from a physician that he was dying. It turned out that it was a mistake and he was really all right, but he still thought he was dying He decided instead of waiting for the disease to kill him, he would just swim out as far as he could into the ocean and just sink. He would have some control over what was happening. When he got out there, however, he decided that maybe it wasn’t such a good idea. He looked up to God and said, “If you help me make it back to the beach, I’ll give you half of everything I own.” He started swimming, making it part-way to shore. He thought he was getting closer, so he looked up to God again and said, “If you help me make it the rest of the way, I’ll give you a fourth of all I have.” He swam a little more and was pretty sure he was going to make it, so he looked up to God and said, “If you help me make it the rest of the way, I’ll put something in the offering plate every once in a while.” How often we break promises to God and to each other.

This past Thursday at the Happy Timers program one of my favorites that Rick McKee sang was the song that he said he and a friend of his had written. It was called “I Will Always Remember You.” The words went something like this: “I will always remember on this day the vow that I made to you.” Do you remember the vow you made one day? At what point did we stop believing in those vows? Maybe we should have known even before we got married. At that first moment we fell in love and had that feeling, “I’ll climb any mountain, I’ll swim the deepest

ocean, just to be with you.” But then the new starts to wear off and we call our lover or our lover calls us and we say, “I’ll be over tonight if the humidity’s not too high.” We come to the table to examine ourselves, to remember broken promises.

Paul says we come to the table to discern the body. Discerning the body means thinking about the church. It means remembering that we are a part of a community. Have you ever thought about it? No one ever receives communion alone. No one celebrates communion alone. It is always a communal act. Even when our Elders take communion to the shut-ins or residents of nursing homes, there are two people present. Communion is a corporate act. When we discern the body it means not only thinking about the Body of Christ the church, but it means remembering also a larger community, persons who are members of God’s family who are not yet members of a church family. We remember to discern the body.

On this holiday weekend, I appreciate the fact you have chosen to be here in worship. Of all of the places that you could have gone, you chose to be here at this place in worship. I appreciate that. I want you to remember this also. You can look around and see that several members of our church family are gone today. Maybe they are spending time with family. If so, that’s a good thing. In the church we talk about how important family is, so we should be careful about being harsh when people have an opportunity to get away and spend time with their families.

In a few moments we will be receiving communion. During that time, you will have an opportunity to examine yourself and to discern the body. I would suggest that you also listen closely. One biblical scholar said that the most poignant words in the Bible are when the thief on the cross said, “Jesus, remember me.” I think those might be the second most poignant words in the Bible. I think the most poignant words in the Bible are when Jesus was with his closest friends in the last hours of his life. He said to them, “Remember me.” I believe if you will listen closely you might hear the living Christ say that to you today, because he still says it to us today. Winnie, Christ says, “Remember me.” Jim, Christ says, “Remember me.” He says that to each of us and if you listen closely you might also hear these words from Christ, “Thanks for remembering me. I will *never* forget you.”

Amen