

## **Maundy Thursday: Remember**

April 14, 2022

Wenksville United Methodist Church

**Exodus 2:1-4, 11-14**

**Luke 22:14-20**

I would like you to take a journey with me down memory lane. Think about your dinner table, and all of your favorite foods. Are there any foods that hold within them a particular memory for you?

I'm guessing there are. And more than likely, you don't have to think very long before different foods start popping into your mind.

For me, I think about my mom's homemade oatmeal bread, and the hours upon hours that she spent kneading bread and waiting for it to rise.

And my stepmom's cheesecake, that she made for me for every single one of my birthdays, because she knew that I loved cheesecake *that* much. The first time I had a birthday after my dad and stepmom got together, my stepmom was at the grocery store buying the makings for my cheesecake when a tornado tore across the grocery store parking lot and took the roof off of the building across the street. I don't know if she thought the cheesecake was worth the terror that inflicted...but I did. It was amazingly delicious.

When I see an extra-rare steak that looks like it might still be mooing, I think of my grandfather. In restaurants, he would always send his steaks back if they weren't rare enough. And spoiler alert: they were *never* rare enough for him.

Or when I eat rice with chopsticks I think about my grandmother who learned how to cook Chinese food when she and my grandfather lived in Taiwan when my mom was little. And I remember the stories that my grandmother would tell about how she taught my mom to use chopsticks by putting a bowl of peanuts in front of her (one of her favorite foods) and letting her eat as many as she wanted – as long as she could pick them up with chopsticks.

When I was a kid, I spent a lot of time at my other grandma's house, and every time I went over there for dinner, my dinner request was the same: corn on the cob, mashed potatoes, and fried chicken. And I have such fond memories of hanging out with my grandma in the kitchen – especially when she would hand me the potato masher and let me go to town. I *loved* mashing potatoes as a kid. And to this day, every time I make mashed potatoes, I think about her.

Food and memory are closely-linked, for *all* of us. For starters, eating is one of the only things that we do as human beings that involves all five of our senses. But it goes even

beyond that. Neurologists have studied the link between food and memory, and have discovered that our brains link together taste and circumstance when encoding a memory about food. So, for example, if I were to go out and eat a strawberry for the first time, and the day was warm and sunny and children were running around and laughing and there was zero stress in that moment, my brain would link the taste of the strawberry with that feeling of perfect bliss. So that the next time I taste a strawberry, it would evoke those same feelings of bliss.

But if I were to eat, say, a piece of bad fish and then my insides felt like they were turning inside-out and I spent all night in front of the toilet, my brain would associate that taste of fish with bad things happening.

In essence, it's our brain's way of keeping us safe. Using our memory of tastes and smells to keep us from poisoning ourselves.

So, as a parent of sometimes picky eaters, I am really curious to test a theory now. I wonder, if surrounding my kids with tons of laughter and giggles and fun when introducing them to a new food might help them encode the memory of that food differently than when I sit them down at the dinner table and make them try something new "under duress." If that works...this is gonna be a mealtime gamechanger in my home.

This link between food and memory goes back a long time. Like, back to the stone ages. But in our stories today we see this link in full color. It is no accident that when the Jewish community gathers together to remember their most sacred stories, they gather around a table for a shared meal.

The Jewish Passover feast is absolutely brilliant, in that it links the eating of different foods with the remembering and re-telling of different stories from their history and tradition.

So, for example, unleavened bread would remind them of the story of the Exodus, when the people had to get out of town quickly and they didn't have time to let the bread dough rise. And so, in their hurry to eat and go, their bread was hard, like a cracker.

And they would eat the Matza bread, and hear the crack, and feel the crunch in their mouth, and taste its blandness, and even thousands of years later, for Jewish people who never experienced the Exodus first-hand, their brain would form an association between the food and the story. The story of their people.

Parsley reminded them of their early prosperity in Egypt. Parsley dipped in saltwater reminded them of the tears of the slaves.

Charoseth – basically ground-up apples and nuts and spices – reminds them of the mortar used to build Egyptian structures.

Horseradish represents the bitterness of slavery.

The lamb shank bone reminds them of the lamb sacrificed by the Israelite slaves, whose blood was spread over their doors, causing the Lord to “pass over” and spare the Israelites during the final plague.

And a hard-boiled egg symbolizes new life.

And when they would see their plate, and smell the smells, and feel the textures, and hear the stories and taste the flavors, their stories became embedded in their memory, in ways that they would not easily forget.

Such that it would be hard to eat a sandwich with horseradish sauce on it, without on some level thinking of the bitterness of slavery.

Or to eat a hard-boiled egg without being reminded of the gift of new life and hope. These memories would not stay at the Passover table. These memories would follow them into their day-to-day lives.

In our reading from Luke today, Jesus and the disciples are gathered together at the table, celebrating Passover. Remembering their stories; bringing to mind their history; celebrating the gift of God with them throughout the centuries.

And everything is going...pretty much like it always goes. Familiar foods...familiar stories...familiar readings and songs and liturgies. A pretty typical Passover.

Until Jesus breaks the mold and does something different. When the supper was over, he took the bread, and broke it. *Snap*. And passed it around the table, allowing each disciple to receive some. And they held the bread, and they felt it. And Jesus said “this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In other words, “I am creating a new memory for you. A new story. From now on, every time you taste bread. Every time you feel bread. Every time you smell bread baking. Every time you break the bread and give it to one another, *this* is the story you will remember. Remember me. Remember who I am. Remember my body, broken for you.

And then he took the cup of wine. And when he had given thanks to God, he passed it around the table, and every person took a sip. “This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you.”

Whenever the sweet bitterness of wine touches your lips. When you feel it. When you smell it. When you taste it. When you hear the cork come out of the bottle, this is what you shall remember. The sweet bitterness of this night, when my blood was shed, for you. And here is what that memory should point you to: a new covenant, between God and God’s people, through which my very body and my very blood puts back together again everything that has been broken.

Now, when the disciples first heard this, they would have been incredibly confused. Because Jesus’ body had not yet been broken, and his blood had not yet been shed. But

just a few hours later, it would be. And for his disciples, bread and wine would forevermore be tied to their memories of him. Their brains would have linked and encoded a memory, bringing together those familiar flavors, with the circumstances of that night, such that they would never forget it.

And just as the Passover functioned as a meal that thousands of years after the actual events of the first Passover made those events real and present to those who celebrated the meal, for us as Christ followers the bread and the cup do the same thing. They evoke for us a memory that isn't even our memory. The events of the Last Supper took place 2,000 years ago. And yet, when we eat the bread and receive the cup, our memories kick into gear anyway, and it is as if we are transported back in time, and the story of what happened that night becomes *our* story too.

And it is a story that wasn't intended *just* to be remembered in those times that we come to church and celebrate communion. It is a story that we are called to remember *every time* we break bread. *Every time* we share in the cup.

And there is something that is lost in translation here. Because the reality is, as United Methodists we tend to associate grape juice most closely with communion. But the reality is, probably most of us don't drink grape juice on a daily basis. The point of Jesus choosing wine that night was that it was one of the most common drinks of the day. It would have been rare to have a meal and not have wine at the table. And so, the idea was that the act of remembering Jesus was to be as common – as ordinary – as everyday – as those things that we share at every single meal.

It would be like coffee, at today's table. Or iced tea. Or water. Imagine, if every sip of coffee, or every drink of water, triggered in your brain thoughts of Jesus, in the same way that mashed potatoes *always* bring to mind for me my grandma, or the smell of baking bread makes me think of my mom.

"Every time you share a meal together," Jesus is telling the disciples – *every single time*, I am there. I am here with you. I am here in the bread that you break. I am here in the wine, or the coffee, or the water, that you drink. I am here, in the conversations that you share with one another around the table. I am here in the ways that you care for one another and share your stories and your lives with one another. I am here in the way that you love one another. I am here in the relationships that you form. And in the ways that you give of yourselves for the sake of other people.

I am here in the stories that you tell, and in the laughter that you share, and in the tears that you shed. I am here, and will always be here, even when my body is broken and my blood is poured out. So each and every time you come to the table, and eat, and drink, and share stories and form memories, remember me. And remember that my story is *yours*.