

Maundy Thursday 2017

Tonight, do we remember?
Tonight, do we recreate?
Tonight, do we experience?

Maybe, we moved into this space to try to be less in the mode of remembrance and more in the mode of experience,
maybe to remember less and experience more,
to be in a space more like an Upper Room and less like a church?
Or at least to wonder together what the relationship between remembering, recreating, and experiencing is.

We and our spiritual ancestors in the faith have been gathering in the church for Maundy Thursday services for a long time.
Our church is modeled on an English church of the Middle Ages, bringing a longer history into our presence.
We use the silver that our European ancestors thought of as the finest stuff.
We cover our table in silk and brocades, as they would have.
Perhaps we have been, once or twice, to a dinner party using similar stuff.
Our weekly communion looks like a fancy, medieval dinner party for Jesus, but in a highly organized auditorium.

But the meal we remember tonight took place in a rented room in Jerusalem.
A group of Galilean peasants and fishermen were on a poorly-planned trip to Jerusalem.
They didn't bring anything nice with them, if they had anything nice.
Whatever was in the room, they used.
Odd and broken and rough things.
Jesus sent the disciples to make preparations for the Passover, but the time and budget did not allow for much preparation.
Even our attempt to simplify tonight cannot recreate what they experienced.
The mixture of pottery and plastic we will use before the end of the evening will perhaps call their situation to mind.

Yet they had the same problem, this struggle to remember,
this desire for authenticity,
for they meant to remember a meal from deep in their own faith history,
more than 1000 years before, when a hastily prepared meal marked their departure from Pharaoh's slavery.
We heard how the haste was to be remembered in the meal;
that successive generations were to eat with staff in hand, sandals on feet, with the food prepared like a to-go plate.
They did all that because they were no longer refugees and escaped slaves;

they had settled down, had even, for a little while, been a semi-powerful kingdom. They had to work to connect with their heritage, with their birthright, with their humble and hasty beginnings.

So maybe we are doing the same, peeking under the symbols and customs of the intervening centuries and trying to remember the night is what we are about this evening, that is why we are here in this awkward arrangement, instead of in our well-arranged church, with its pews and altar fixed to the floor.

I recently read a fascinating book about the history of the monuments of Washington. The author explained in it that public monuments are inherently conservative phenomenon.

They seek to establish, in stone and bronze, a certain reading of the past. Hero, martyr, statesman; no matter what else was said of him by his contemporaries. In the earliest days of our country, many argued against such monuments. For George Washington, the Father of our Country, many said that the most fitting monument would be a free people, who clung to their laws and preserved their democracy; that a great statue of him on horseback would fail the very traditions he fought to establish.

Don't remember, they said, **be!**

Don't seek to recreate, instead hold fast to what you have already and maintain! Live not by memory and monument but in an eternal present.

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant as well, when he promised his Spirit that night, when he insisted on the eternal nature of love, when he said this bread and cup will bear me into your presence and you into mine forever, that all that I have done for you, you must do for each other, and I will be present in that.

Silver, pottery or plastic; silk or burlap or no covering at all; a barely furnished upper room or a gilded cathedral. They all work just as well.

Whatever we use, wherever we gather, the Holy Spirit closes the gap between Christ and us, between each of us and our neighbors, between the realms of memory, present reality, and the promised kingdom.

It is all here.