Re-membering

John 21:9-17

Buckingham Church

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More than once in our words around Holy Communion, we say that Jesus told us to eat and drink “in remembrance of him.” That word, “remember” can mean so many different things, and all of them come into play here. We can remember stories we’ve heard about Jesus. We can remember all that he taught us. We can remember his radical actions of sacrificial love. We can remember his tough challenges to us. We can remember all the times we have gathered at a table of Communion and those who were there with us.

The ancient church took that word in a slightly different path. Remembering becomes “anamnesis,” which is a remembering of the past such that it becomes real in the present. Jesus’ presence is not just hypothetical or in the form of a story, but in some way (and the churches forever argue about what this means), Jesus is ***real*** in the meal.

Whatever “real” means to you, you know the power of food to evoke a presence. You have probably experienced this in a way with someone you know who has died or is far away. I smell scalloped potatoes and feel like my Grandmother Yeager is in the room with me. Food is a powerful way for memories to feel real to us in the now. Jesus chose food to be the spark to remembrance deliberately. Do this in remembrance of me.

A few years ago, I read an essay by a South African theologian and pastor named Peter Storey that sent this concept of “remembering” in a brand-new direction for me. This is what he wrote:

“Have you ever thought that the opposite of remembering is not forgetfulness? The opposite of remembering is ***dismembering***. We live in a dismembered world, and it is around this table that we re-member the world, the broken pieces are put together again, God mends the entire universe! That can only happen, however, because Christ has been broken open on the cross. It is only out of his brokenness that healing and mending can come. The breaking of bread reminds us of our own vocation to be willing to be broken in the cause of wholeness.” (*Conflict and Communion,* p. 65)

The bread broken. The body of Christ dis-membered. But when taken into our bodies, when our bodies are joined with each other, then Christ is re-membered. Put back together. And we are made alive in a new way as the body of Christ. As, in some spiritually mysterious way, Christ is put back together inside us, as us. Re-membered.

That’s what I think Jesus was getting at when he talked with Peter after they had shared bread and fish together at this extraordinary breakfast. “Peter,” Jesus says, “you ate bread and fish with me. Do you love me?” Three times, Peter responds that of course he does. Three times Jesus says “Then, having been fed by and with me, having been fed ***me***, go feed the little ones out there, tend my flock, feed all my sheep.” Remember me. Re-member the world. As a Jew, Jesus knew the concept of *tikkun olam*, in Hebrew, “repair of the world.”

When Paul said to the Corinthian Church that it was wrong to eat and drink at Christ’s table not acknowledging Christ’s body, this is what he was getting at. If we are unchanged by this meal, then the broken pieces of bread and sip of juice are just that, a snack. No remembering, no re-membering, no body of Christ created anew each time in us as individuals and in us as a community of faith.

What remembering in Holy Communion can mean for us is that, like Peter after that lakeside breakfast, we become a little more like Jesus and go out into the world to be a little more like Jesus every time. We intentionally and regularly look for the hungers in the world. Yes, those who hunger for food, but also those who hunger for love, for justice, for truth, for peace, for reconciliation, for someone to see them fully and accept them. Those are the lambs, the flock, the sheep. **We are called to seek out opportunities small and large to be Jesus “in the cause of wholeness.”**

In his essay, Storey remembers the Prayer of Humble Access, some version of which is used in many Christian traditions. The end of that prayer reads like this, “Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so as to partake of this sacrament of your Son Jesus Christ, **that we may walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in Christ, and Christ in us.”**

We come to this table not just to dwell comfortably in Christ’s loving arms, though God knows we need that, but to remember that Christ now lives in us. In this dismembered and distraught and downright dystopian world, we, even we, are called to re-member. Amen.