

Dave Johnson

Sermon: “Do this in Remembrance of Me” (I Corinthians 11:23-25)

Maunder Thursday: April 21, 2011

As human beings we tend to be forgetful. All of us can think of times (some more than others) when we have forgotten something.

Have you ever experienced the anxiety of taking an exam and forgotten something that is on it—“I *know* this... why can't I remember it right now?”—the anxiety increasing as the time ticks away toward having to turn in your exam. Have you ever forgotten to pay an important bill or forgotten that you were supposed to meet someone for lunch? Have you ever driven to the store and forgotten to buy the main thing you intended to buy until you return home, or forgotten an important birthday or anniversary (often forgetting an anniversary is something that happens only once; the ramifications can be rather painful ☺).

I was at a dinner party last week and someone remarked about often seeing movie ads in the newspaper and thinking, “I think I'd like to see that, but I'll wait and rent it when it comes out on DVD” only months later to ask, “What was that movie I was going to rent?”.

The first wedding I ever officiated I forgot the “you may kiss the bride” moment—there was no kiss during the wedding. I was reminded about that afterwards by the bride herself. I haven't forgotten that since ☺.

In his poem, *Forgetfulness*, Billy Collins, a former Poet Laureate of the United States, wrote:

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,
never even heard of,
as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

It is one thing to forget something for an exam or the plot of a novel; it is something else entirely to forget a person who loves you.

When I was in high school one of my favorite bands was a band from Scotland called Simple Minds (in fact once I was playing a Simple Minds cassette—yes, a *cassette*—and an adult asked me who I was listening to. “Simple Minds,” I replied, to which the adult responded, “*You're*

listening to Simple Minds? How appropriate” ☺). Their biggest hit was entitled, *Don't You (Forget about Me)*, and in the chorus lead vocalist Jim Kerr sings,

Don't you forget about me
Don't, don't, don't, don't
Don't you forget about me

It's an amazing song, and powerfully expresses the longing that we have not to be forgotten by those we love.

On Maundy Thursday we focus on Jesus' actions with his disciples at the Last Supper. During the Last Supper Jesus told the disciples:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another... This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 13:34 and 15:12-13).

At the Last Supper Jesus not only gave the “new commandment” to love one another, he also did two acts that demonstrate what it looks like to love one another: he washed the disciples' feet and he instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Tonight I am preaching briefly on Holy Communion, a sacrament Jesus himself instituted so that we would not forget about him.

In this evening's lesson from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians we have the earliest account of Jesus' institution of Holy Communion:

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (I Corinthians 11:23-25).

In Paul's account of Jesus' institution of Holy Communion we see that Jesus twice emphasized, “Do this in remembrance of me,” so that we would never forget that we are loved, absolutely unconditionally loved by Almighty God.

We preach a lot about grace here at Christ Church, and grace refers to God's one-way love for us that never ever ends. Holy Communion was instituted by Jesus to remind us again and again and again that he continually loves us and continually gives us grace.

In the back of *The Book of Common Prayer* there is a section called “Historical Documents of the Church” (maybe more people would read it if it were entitled “*Hysterical* Documents of the Church” ☺). This section includes the Thirty-nine Articles, the classic doctrinal summation of the Anglican Church. In Article XXV we see sacraments, referring to Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, defined as

“certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him” (BCP 872).

The bread and wine we receive at Holy Communion are indeed “*certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us*”—tangible reminders of God’s love for us and grace toward us right now, no matter what is going on in our lives.

The ultimate demonstration of God’s love for us and grace towards us is of course Jesus’ death on the cross for us. At the Last Supper Jesus had told his disciples, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” and the very next day he demonstrated that greatest kind of love by laying down his life for his disciples and for all of us on the cross.

But we tend to forget. We tend to forget God and his love for us.

And at Holy Communion we are reminded yet again of God’s love for us, demonstrated above all in Jesus’ death on the cross. That’s why Jesus emphasized that every time we receive the bread and wine at Holy Communion we do so *in remembrance of him*.

In the Eucharistic Prayer that we will pray in a few minutes we are immediately pointed to God’s immeasurable love for us as seen in Jesus’ death on the cross:

“Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all... He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world” (BCP 362).

We need to be reminded again and again of God’s love for us and grace towards us, and at Holy Communion we bring nothing but open hands to receive anew God’s love and grace.

One evening this week while one of my daughters was at a basketball practice at Buford Middle School, I took a long walk and ended up walking through Oakwood Cemetery. One of the gravestones caught my eye. It was small and had a small lamb sitting on the top. It was the grave of a small child, who was born in the summer of 1957 and died in the spring of 1960. The

epitaph read, "Sleep on sweet baby and rest. We loved you so much but God loved you the best."

At Holy Communion, we are reminded that God indeed has loved us the best, that Jesus gave his life not only for that little child, not only for his disciples, but also for you and me, for all of us.

At Holy Communion we receive "certain sure witnesses and effectual signs" of God's grace; we are reminded that Jesus encourages us, "Don't You Forget about Me;" and we can remember that even if we forget God, God has never forgotten us.

Amen.