

Does this seem odd? We will share today a holy meal and remember how Jesus' dying demonstrates the love of God. We will remember he gave his life to rescue people like us from our darker selves, and our selfish tendencies. We will remember not simply one event, but an entire story full of Jesus' passion. It begins with his sharing a Passover meal with disciples. During the meal, he asks them to take bread and cup and remember him. (Luke 22:19) So important is this remembering, we carve the words into our communion table.

So important is this remembering, it is found in the very center of a book of grieving. For our first lesson today, we read Lamentations. It is a book of mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and its people being taken as prisoners to Babylon. In the middle of these laments, there is an aside. It remembers how God's steadfast love never ceases.

So important is this remembering, it is a critical part of Paul's encouragement to a young church leader. From prison, an old apostle reminds his friend to guard what truly matters. Does this seem odd to you? In the middle of life, there is sometimes difficulty and struggle. Here is a place and a time for being still and experiencing the good news of Jesus Christ and being directed to guard what we have.

So important is this remembering, we will do some of it ourselves. First, we will remember the good news already at work. Secondly, we will remember how we can guard it so that it will do what it is supposed to do in us.

First, just look at the good news already at work. On the front page of this letter, Paul explodes with appreciation. He is grateful every time he thinks about this young Timothy. He remembers Timothy's emotion and wants to see him and laugh again together. He remembers his mother and grandmother, how he grew up in the faith. He remembers the gifts God has given him to use. He tells him what God didn't do. Then he tells him what God did do. God did not give him a spirit of timidity and cowardice and hesitation. He gave him a spirit of power and love and self discipline.

I had a seminary professor who talked to me like this. Dr. Cullen Storey taught New Testament languages. He believed I could do Intensive Hebrew; I had done well in Greek. I took his class the same fall that William was born in August. Even though, I enjoyed Hebrew, I could not keep up. I failed the class. I remember meeting Doctor Storey in the campus center. He said to me, "Fred, what happened to you on this exam? You are such a good student? He put his arm around me and said, 'I know you. You are an excellent language student. What is going on?'" I explained about our new son and my new job as an intern at a nearby church. He told me to try Hebrew the next summer. I did and it went quite well. That next summer he wasn't teaching me languages; Dr. Storey beat me 21-19 in the semi-finals annual pingpong tournament for language students. When I think of teachers who excelled in their discipline and shaped my life, I think of Cullen Storey and I smile.

There are people who have shaped your life. When you think of them, you smile. There are people you long to see again. There are people whose faith has helped make you who you are. When you receive the bread and the cup, remember Christ at work in them.

Yesterday, we gathered in this sanctuary and remembered Chet Starkey. Chet chose the scriptures we read: Psalm 121, Ecclesiastes 3, Isaiah 61, John 14 and 1 Corinthians 15. It was an impressive selection of readings that conveyed the faith of a beloved church leader. To hear those scriptures was to be encouraged to stand beside Chet Starkey and believe along with him. There are those who have affirmed their faith in Christ and you have been strengthened by their convictions. When you receive the bread and the cup today, remember Christ at work in them.

Someone has written, "While this approach seeks joy in the midst of sorrow...the finding is not always...easy. From Paul's point of view, there seems to be no thought of anger or anxiety, but rather gratitude. Perhaps this puts some of us off. Here is something people of faith often discover.

When we face setbacks, pausing to give thanks can make all the difference in the world. Gratitude puts things in perspective.” (135, Holmes)

First, we begin with good news. Secondly, we continue with practice. We guard the good news in our lives by putting faith to work, practicing what we believe. Notice the exhortations Paul has for Timothy: hold to the standard of sound teachings that you have heard and guard the good treasure entrusted to you.

There are two powerful ways we hold onto sound teachings and put our faith to work. The first is in finding a group of people with whom we study the truth and grace of God. The second is going on a mission to serve someone else. All of us can get involved with other people in considering God’s truth and grace. All of us can find a way to leave the comforts of home and go somewhere in service to someone else. There are circles and Sunday school classes and DISCIPLE Bible studies underway right now. There are mission trips and efforts abounding. Tony Robinson says going on some kind of mission puts into practice our faith more than we can imagine. Just listen to the stories of those who come back from mission trips. Make a point to come on the Wednesday night the Mission Trip people speak. Not only do they apply God’s compassion in ways that make a difference, they get connected to fellow members in ways that are unforgettable.

Still another way we practice our faith is in worshipping the One who creates us. Chris Wiman was ...a terminal cancer patient---thirty-nine, newly married, newly published, and now facing sure death. He and his wife grieved deeply the shared life that would not be. “Then one morning,” wrote Wiman, “we found ourselves going to church. *Found ourselves*. That’s exactly what it felt like...so that we were casting aside the Sunday paper and moving toward the door with barely a word between us; and as if, once inside the church, we were discovering exactly where and who we were meant to be.” Long walks talking of God, deep sadness that told them of God’s own grief. In the face of death, Wiman found no trite and obvious glories, but rather the quiet scrapings that assured him of a Presence on the other side of a wall. (139, Holmes)

Putting faith to work does not always mean our life is shaped in the way we want. It does mean God meets us. This morning, when you receive the bread and the cup remember Christ is at work here and now in precisely what we are doing together.

Here is a mystery we cannot explain. John Calvin writes, “This mystery of Christ’s secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible, he shows its figure and image in visible signs best adapted to our small capacity...just as bread and wine sustain physical life, so are souls fed by Christ.” (1361, Calvin) In our own ways, we remember those who have shaped our lives. Christ has been present in them. We recognize this mystery; this is good news. Secondly, we also remember the ways our lives are being formed by the practice of our faith here and now. Christ is present with us there too. Today, as we receive the bread and the cup, remember Christ and be thankful.

Holy God, you invite us to dine on word and sacrament. We remember the good news of Jesus Christ. We remember such news in people who have shaped our lives. We remember good news in studying the truth for ourselves, in sharing an insight with a friend, in reaching out to a neighbor in need, in lifting our voices in song as we stand here today. Lord, move us with faith and power and love and discipline to recognize you present in this sanctuary. Move us to receive you into our bodies and souls as we receive from this Lord’s Table. We pray for your word to form us. Shape us, Lord, so we will be equipped to go and forgive and serve and reconcile ourselves to one another and you. Shape us, Lord, through our remembering so we will love you and our neighbor wherever she is, wherever he is. Hear us as we pray, Our Father who art in heaven...

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