

The Christ to Remember

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Mark Schloneger

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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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. (1 Corinthians 11:23-34)

There is a forty-one-year-old woman in California
who remembers every day of her life since she was eleven years old.
She remembers that on Sunday, August 3, 1986, a friend called her on the telephone.
She remembers what happened on a television show
that she was watching on Monday, December 12, 1988.

She remembers everything for every day,
the significant and the routine:
trips to the grocery store, world events,
the weather, casual greetings, short and long conversations.

It's easy to think of all the advantages in having a memory like this,
but listen to how this woman describes it:

*"I remember the good, which is very comforting.
But I also remember the bad – and every bad choice.
And I really don't give myself a break. . . .
I don't forgive myself for a lot of things.
Your memory is the way it is to protect you,
[but] I feel like [mine] just hasn't protected me.
Most people have called what I have a gift.
I call it a burden."¹*

¹ Joshua Foer, "Memory: Why We Remember, Why We Forget," *National Geographic* (November 2007).

This woman feels as if her memory imprisons her in the past.
It won't allow her to live fully in the present,
and so it won't allow her to dream freely about the future.

There is an eighty-five-year-old man who also lives in California.
He can't remember anything since 1960.
He can tell you the temperature that water boils.
He knows the number of weeks in a year.
He can place countries in the correct continents.
But he can't remember what he's eaten for breakfast.
He doesn't even know whether he's eaten breakfast.
He greets everyone as a stranger,
even people he's met hundreds of times.
Every day, several times a day, this man leaves his home
to take a walk down unfamiliar streets.
He passes waving neighbors that he doesn't recognize.
He returns to a house he doesn't know.

Unlike the woman who remembers everything,
the man who remembers nothing is generally happy.
He is free from worry, he has no stress, but he is often confused.
With nothing to draw from for context,
he's blind to the reality in which he lives.
He doesn't know that he is imprisoned in the present --
his lack of memory traps him between a past he can't remember
and a future he can't imagine.²

Of course, this woman and this man represent the extremes of memory disorders.
That's why their stories were written in the article where I first read about them.
But their stories illustrate how much our memory is a part of our identity,
how our memories can comfort us, break us, free us, or imprison us.
What we remember is inextricably linked to how we understand ourselves,
who we are and who we will be.

I wonder about you, about your memory.
Do mistakes or pain reach out from the past to pull you back from the present?
Or do you think so much about living, surviving, getting through the right now
that you feel groundless, driftless, so that impossible to imagine a different future?

*On the night that he was betrayed,
the Lord Jesus took the bread,
and when he had given thanks,
he broke it, and said,
'This is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.'
And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying,*

² Ibid.

*'This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'* (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

In remembrance of me, Jesus said.
When we celebrate communion together, we eat and drink to remember.
To remember rightly.
To remember justly.
To remember Jesus.

It seems that the church in Corinth had a memory problem.
In the verses just before the verses that I read from 1 Corinthians, chapter 11,
Paul writes that the church's practice of the Lord's Supper
was not in memory of Christ.
They were remembering themselves only.
Everyone was serving themselves first,
not waiting for anybody else.
Some went hungry, while others got drunk.
Some ate much while others had nothing.
What they were eating and drinking was not the Lord's Supper, Paul says.
because they were only feeding themselves --
their needs, their desires, their gratification.
They weren't remembering rightly.
They weren't remembering justly.
They weren't remembering Jesus.

They claimed that it was the Lord's Supper, but, when people only remember themselves,
it's really a meal of condemnation.
That's because we will never provide enough to satisfy our deepest longings.
There will never be enough food, there will never be enough money, there is never enough.
So we're condemned to work and to work and to work and never rest.
And we're destined to eat and to eat and to eat, and never be fed.
Because never-ending hunger must be met with never-ending consumption,
the ones with too much eat at the expense of the ones with too little.
Our hunger is never satisfied, our anxiety is never calmed,
and our neighbors, they go hungry.
COVID-19 has revealed how much we depend on each other,
and how the exercise and protection of individual rights
without thought of the community leaves us all sick.
Our breaths, our lives, do not stop with us.
We're connected to each other,
to those who have gone before us, and to those who will come after us.
We need a memory that releases us to imagine, to dream freely about the future, together.

Eat this bread, drink from this cup, do this to remember me, Jesus said.
I read an interview with Emmanuel Katongole this past week.
He's a Catholic priest from Uganda, and he's also a faculty member
of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame.
Katongole says that the Eucharist

is the bedrock of Christian memory, and, because memory is part of the imagination, it's also the bedrock of Christian imagination.³

In the Lord's Supper, he says, all elements of the Christian story come together.
It draws us into remembering the past.
In Christ's life, death and resurrection, you have been remembered by God,
reconciled to God and others, and freed to live as a child of God.

The Lord's Supper reminds us to live fully in the present.
In Christ, "New creation is here!"
Right now. Right here. In you. In us. Together.

And the Lord's Supper invites us to remember the future.
To remember the future -- it seems like a contradiction, doesn't it?
But in Christ, we know where this story is headed,
and our life together, as a church, by the Spirit,
gives a foretaste of the kingdom that's coming.

The Lord's Supper reminds us where we've been, where we are and where we're going.
It locates us.
It shapes us.
It nourishes us for life in Christ.
Life together.⁴

When we taste the bread,
when we put the cup to our lips,
we remember that the past, the present, and the future
have been liberated, redeemed and freed by the presence of Christ.

But this table not only reminds us what we remember.
It reminds us of who first remembered us.
In Jesus, God has remembered us.
The question is whether we will allow God's memory
to heal our memories, so that the things we experience and remember will be molded,
formed, and transformed to become a part of God's healing for the world.
That's what the church in Corinth was missing.

It's been over a year since we've celebrated communion together.
In preparing for today, I realized how much I've missed it.
There's a lot we're missing right now,
and infections are up,
and winter is coming
and it's going to be a long time before we can all be together in this space,
sharing the same air, singing our praises to God.

³ Jake Meador, "Deep Solidarity: An Interview with Emmanuel Katongole," *Plough Quarterly* (Autumn, 2020), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*

One of you told me this past week that you feel like you're hanging by a thread.
I imagine that's true for many of us.

And so, hear this.

You who are working in health care, stretched to the limits of what you are able to do,
I want you to know, Christ remembers you.

You who are teaching, working in the schools, facing the impossible task
of disrupted schedules, on-line learning, and the daily risk of infection
Christ remembers you.

You who are children, who are tired of wearing masks, and wondering
when you can visit friends and grandparents,
Christ remembers you.

You who are parents of children at home, facing decisions with no good options,
feeling like your failing in your attempts to hold everything together,
Christ remembers you.

You who are older, longing to see your children and grandchildren, struggling with loneliness,
Christ remembers you.

You who go to bed each night with thoughts you can't stop swirling through your brain,
Christ remembers you.

We are living through a time of momentous change.

What do we do with we've all been given that we didn't want?

Can we even imagine that new earth, heavens new, the Spirit of God moving?

Where do we begin? What can we do?

Yesterday, many of you came by our church building to receive
the bread and the juice that we will use for communion.

It's important for you and for all of us to remember – to remember,
that we come to Christ's table as recipients, as beggars.

At the Lord's Table, we receive what God has freely given.

We receive everything we need as gift.

And so, we don't have to pretend that we are not needy;

We don't have to put on a good face to hide that we're tired or struggling or worried.

We don't need to project that we are self-sufficient, that we're doing just fine, thank you.

No, all of us come to receive,

because all of us are in desperate need of Christ,
Christ's forgiveness, Christ's love.

We come to remember Christ

because, in Christ, God first remembered us.

When we taste the bread,

When we put the cup to our lips,

we remember that the past, the present, and the future

have been liberated, redeemed and freed by the presence of Christ

Because of that, we may give our lives as participants in Christ's healing and hope
at a time when so many people are suffering and struggling.