

**Tales of the Table**  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

4<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Whenever followers of Jesus gather around the Communion table, we tell a story. We remember when he gathered with his friends in Jerusalem for a holy meal around a table. Imagine the room that night was full of love and joy, so much you could see it in his eyes and the eyes of those with him. You could almost taste it, this presence of the Lord. Presence, at the same time haunted by a premonition of absence, of loss, of pain, of separation. You could see it, you could sense something was about to happen, you could almost taste it, taste the fear and worry, the anxiety, could almost taste death.

Those present that night would never forget it, it was never far from their thoughts. They thought about it all the time, dreamt about it. They relived that night, replayed the scenes over and over, recounted the story to themselves and to each other. They repeated the story over and over again so that they would never forget, so that it would become part of them, so that it would shape them and define them, live within them, flow from them. They told the story, they remembered that night, and they pass it on—one by one. From the disciples it made its way to Paul, passed down, handed down, handed over to him. The story was so fresh and alive to him. You would have guessed by the way Paul tells it that he was in the room where it happened, that it was the Lord himself who spoke to him, which he then handed over to the church in Corinth:

*“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over, the night 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 this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he come” (1 Cor. 11:23-26).*

The table here in the sanctuary helps us to remember the story. The table helps us tell the story. The table helps us live the story. The table is preaching the story, the table *is* the story, the core story, the *kerygma*, the definitive story that’s still being told because it’s still being lived whenever we gather at his table and remember.

The table reminds us to practice what we preach. The table says: embody the message. Enact the story. Let it come alive. Remember. Do *this* in remembrance—this, this right here, this table with bread and wine—do this in remembrance of me. *Anamnesis*, in Greek. Jesus wants us to remember, he wants us to remember what the bread and cup symbolize, remember that God will be found kneaded in the bread of human brokenness, in a broken body, a body tortured and disfigured by hate and evil and all that resists the power and presence of redemptive love and compassion to flow in our hearts. God will be found poured out in the flow of tears and sweat and even blood. We have to remember his death at this table. We can’t afford to forget it.

*Anamnesis*, not amnesia is required of us. One of my New Testament professors at Princeton Seminary was J. Christiaan Beker. One day in class he was waxing theological about something, I can't remember what, but then he said something that I do remember, that struck me. He said: "Sin is forgetfulness." So simple. So profound. Whenever we forget who we are and whose we are, we sin. Whenever we forget who we are and whose we are, we fall—again and again. This means that we are saved through remembrance.

Remember the story of suffering love. Remember the time when the love and glory of God was on display for all the world to see in his broken body on a Roman cross. Sure, this is the story of death, of betrayal, of humanity rejecting God, rejecting another human being. But it's also the story of God's determination to not let human sin have the final word. It's the story of a new covenant, a new relationship established between God and God's people rooted in the promise of resurrection, of life that emerges from dead places, of hope that emerges for people who have given up on hope, given up on God, given up on humanity, given up on themselves.

The table tells the story of Christ *crucified*. Christ of the cross. And we proclaim his death until he comes. Absence, yet presence. Present with him as we re-member, drawn to him and to one another, bearing witness to God's presence in the places of absence, the places of brokenness and grief and suffering.

Yes, the table tells a story of the crucified Lord. But we can also turn things around, for at the center of the Christian story we find a *table*. Go into the catacombs outside Rome. The oldest frescos painted on the walls and ceilings there don't depict images of Jesus on a cross, but Jesus at a table with his disciples, with his friends. The earliest symbol of the crucified Lord is not a cross, but his table around which his people continue to tell the story of suffering love, who live the story of suffering love.

When we remember the Lord around this Communion table we can't help but be shaped by the story—and this story really needs to be told and lived today, by you and me. We need to remember who we are as ones who bear the sign of the cross in our lives. We need to remember whose we are, for much is being required of the broken body of Christ these days. We can't afford to forget.

*Anamnesis*, not amnesia, is required for the living of these days. In the streets of Baltimore and Catonsville and Columbia and beyond, wherever God's people are suffering and crying out. This has been a tough week for Baltimore, [mocked by the President](#), mocked by people around him who laughed at the violence and crime and murder rate in the city. Hundreds of Presbyterians [walked the streets of Baltimore](#) this week in an act of *anamnesis*, as we remembered the victims of gun violence and cried out for peace and healing and reform and justice—we invoked their names, we remembered them and the violence done to them. And then yesterday, El Paso...and then Dayton. [Lord, have mercy on us](#).

Something evil has been and is being released among us. Followers of Jesus can't look away. The pastoral staff of the National Cathedral released a bold statement this past week—[Have We No Decency? A Response to President Trump](#)—a word to religious leaders, indeed, to the church as a whole: "As leaders of faith who believe in the sacredness of every single human

being, the time for silence is over. We must boldly stand witness against the bigotry, hatred, intolerance, and xenophobia that is hurled at us, especially when it comes from the highest offices of this nation. We must say that this will not be tolerated. To stay silent in the face of such rhetoric is for us to tacitly condone the violence of these words. We are compelled to take every opportunity to oppose the indecency and dehumanization that is racism, whether it comes to us through words or actions.”

We can't gather at the table and “do this in remembrance of him” and then leave here and forget the story of the crucified Lord, as if his suffering love means nothing! Well, we can, of course. In fact, we're pretty good at doing this. The Church is proficient at forgetting its Lord.

But I don't want to forget. I know you don't want to forget, but we do forget because all have terrible memories, and because being faithful to a crucified Lord isn't easy. The good news is that we don't remember by ourselves. We are given this table. We need this table, to hear its story again and again. The Lord has given us this table to help us remember him and remember the difficult, yet joyful work he is calling each of us toward: to take up a cross, to do the difficult task of serving him with our lives.

Taste and see—the crucified Lord.