

Bread and Cup: the power of Memory
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This past week, having stalled for a while,
I finally got around to doing what parents generally do when kids depart for college or jobs -- which is to reclaim their space.
The exodus of a kid provides the opportunity to have, say, that spare bedroom you've always wanted,
or a workspace you've always needed.
Or, at a more basic level, the level I was operating at,
the exodus of kids provides the chance to locate the source of the smells that have been emanating from their space.
There were foodstuffs under Andres' bed that had clearly been there for quite some time,
and the dirty socks that had found their way under a bookshelf also helped explain why we went through so many cans of Febreze on the second floor this summer.
So, shovel and rake in hand, I got to work on his room,
to reestablish it as a place of human habitation.

But since Andres is just midway through college, he'll be back in that space,
so I was conscious, even while fumigating, of not wanting to de-Andres the space totally --
it still needed to feel like his room when he comes back.
So, you know, posters stay on the wall,
ASP t-shirts stay in the drawer,
and that large stuffed animal he's had for over a decade stays right where it is ...
and he will kill me for telling you about it, so please, keep your lips zipped on that one.

Brigitta, on the other hand, has really flown the nest,
graduated from college, living on the other side of the world,
So tackling her room was a bit more intensive ... it wasn't just cleaning up debris,
but really packing stuff up and putting it away.
The idea was to actually get rid of a bunch of stuff,
but as you might imagine, in most cases I couldn't bring myself to throw things away.

Nor should I.

Almost everything I picked up, or pulled out of drawers, took off shelves, almost every thing carried a memory with it.

A little medal, no name on it, but a picture of a book -- and I remembered she got that for some library challenge in 2nd grade, whoever read X number of books got a medal. There it was.

A seashell, but of course not just any seashell: a seashell picked up on a South Carolina beach on a family vacation.

A pencil holder shaped like a sheep, chosen with care from a gift shop in the north of England.

And the diary which she would shove into a drawer whenever I walked in the room, which says, in bold lettering on the front:

"If you read this book without my permission, you are a terrible person and you will feel guilty for the rest of your life."

All of these things, each one of them, when I picked it up, immediately brought a picture to mind -- a ten year old in a gift shop, a secretive pre-teen, a cheerful kid on a beach, a girl with her nose in a book. Every one of these things were so much more than things, and so, of course, they've all been saved.

In just a few moments, we're going to hold a couple things in our hands.

A little piece of bread.

A tiny cup of juice.

And each one of these things is meant to bring a picture to mind, too.

A very particular picture.

A picture of a man sitting in a room, an upstairs room, at the head of a table;

a man looking around at all his friends, who are enjoying a feast, a Passover seder, lots of good food.

A picture of man picking up a loaf of bread, and clearing his throat, and getting everyone's attention,

and then giving a blessing over the bread, and sharing it.
And doing the same thing with the cup --
blessing it and sharing it.
And then saying to them,
when you do this again, when you pick up a piece of bread again,
when you grab hold of a cup again,
do me a favor? remember me.

As powerfully as a seashell brought back for me the picture of a girl on a beach,
just as powerfully, Jesus was hoping,
just as powerfully, grabbing hold of a piece of bread would bring his picture back to us.

Tonight, back here in the Parlor,
we're having one of our open Book Chats --
a chance for anyone who wants to get together with me and other church folks,
and talk about a good book.
And this month, we're talking about *The Giver*.
It's a book that my kids and my husband, and much of the country,
read long before I did --
it was written twenty years ago.
I just got to it this summer,
after the movie came out and I realized I really needed to read what the teens in my
youth group have been talking about for all these years.
The book was written with young adults in mind,
but that doesn't matter, it's good stuff no matter the age.
For those here who don't know it,
(and without any spoilers, I promise), here's the premise of the book:
"The Giver" is set in a future utopia
where all are fed and clothed and sheltered,
and where no one knows hardship or pain,
It's all very pleasant.
But there is, of course, a price.
In order for there to be no pain, no sorrow, no regrets,
the powers that be have eliminated the community's memory.
There is no collective memory

of what used to be, of what the world used to be,
before a drab pleasantness was created for everyone to live in.

And among the many weird consequences of this absence of memory
is that there are things that no longer carry any meaning,
because no one can remember what they signify.
Babies are given stuffed animals to play with,
but because animals have been removed from this utopia,
these soft squishy comfort objects, as they call them, don't represent anything they
know.

So a child with a stuffed giraffe has no memory of seeing one in a zoo,
and a kid with a stuffed puppy dog has no idea, no memory, of a real puppy.
The symbol, the thing, has become meaningless
because there is no memory.

Jesus wanted it never to be that way for us.
He wanted bread and cup always to mean something to us when we shared it
together.
He wanted us, whenever we sat together and shared bread and cup,
to remember him,
to call his image to mind,
to picture him among us.
He wanted us never, ever to lose the memory of his presence among us,
of his walk on this earth.
"Whenever you do this," he said, "remember me.
Do it in memory of me.
Don't forget. Call me to mind."

When I sit in Brigitta's room, and go through her stuff,
there's a poignancy to it, but not overwhelming. I know I'll see her again,
not for months, but again.
But for each person in this room who has had to go through the belongings of a loved
one who will not be there again,
the poignancy, the sorrow, can be overwhelming.
To pick up something last held by someone you cherished

is both incredibly sweet and utterly heartbreaking.

It's really, really hard.

And you have to think that for Jesus' friends, who adored him, the first time they picked up bread and cup without him must have been overwhelming, must have broken their hearts. Because he was no longer there to share it.

Except, except -- then he was.

Then, somehow, inexplicably, miraculously, he was there. Again. And forever.

And when we share his bread and his cup, the same becomes true for us.

Jesus himself is present with us, utterly alive, utterly real, right beside us and somehow within us, surrounding us with love and holding us close.

More than that, though, more than that, when we share bread and cup, we remember each person we loved whose life among us has ended, but whose life has not ended.

In bread and cup, we are reminded of the truth that Christ made visible: that death is no end.

That the great communion of saints extends beyond the limits of what we see, and embraces all those we have ever loved and been loved by.

By bread and cup, by memory and faith, at this table is seated not only the One who cherishes us beyond measure, but all the people whom we have ever cherished.

Today is actually a very special Sunday in the life of the church worldwide.

Today is Worldwide Communion Sunday, a Sunday when Christians everywhere are invited to share in communion and to do it knowing that they are sharing bread and cup with brothers and sisters around this world.

So when we eat our bread, and drink our little cup,
we are doing it at the same time and the same spirit
as Christians in a small whitewashed church in rural India,
and Christians in a little house church in Myanmar,
and Christians in grand Parisian cathedrals,
and Christians gathered in a refugee camp in Turkey.

All of us, all of us, remembering.

All of us, every one of us,

grasping our bread and letting a picture flood our mind:

a picture of a man, long ago,

in an upstairs room,

sitting there overwhelmed by love for us.

All of us, everyone of us,

remembering the One who said "do this in memory of me."

And all of us, every one of us,

remembering what this simple bread and cup really means.

That the memory of a gentle Savior who once **was**

becomes faith in that same Savior, who was, and is, and evermore will be.

That love does not end and life never ends.

That it is possible for something as simple as bread and cup

to have sustained people over hundreds of generations,

and sustains them still today,

all around this beautiful and hard and hope-filled world.

Bread of memory.

Cup of blessing.

Let's share it now together.