

**FIRST PARISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
East Derry, New Hampshire**

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

13 April 2006

Mark 14:12-25

“Do this in remembrance of me.” The communion table says it. Many traditional communion liturgies say it. We think of Jesus as having said it when he was at the table with his disciples on the night of his last supper; and Luke does put those words in Jesus’ mouth – and Paul. But not Mark or Matthew. What do they mean? What was Jesus instructing when he said, do this in remembrance of me? What does it mean to remember?

There’s always that fun stroll down memory lane that we sometimes get into at family reunions or college reunions or when we’re introducing a new boyfriend or girlfriend into the family and reveling in whatever embarrassment we can inflict on our loved one. There’s the tendency to look to the past with rose colored glasses, especially when something in the present isn’t to our liking; then we can look back and recall and sigh longingly for what used to be. I’ve recently been part of some conversations that challenged a decision to learn more about the past: isn’t that just an avoidance of the present? Why do you want to go back there? Do you really think anything helpful can come from dredging up all that old stuff? And then there’s the inevitable bittersweet time of remembering that occurs around deaths and in funeral preparation and at the reception that follows. Just who was that person and what did we do together? What did we mean to each other?

So what are we supposed to make of this word, “remember?” Are any of those common usages I just referred to what Jesus had in mind? My ruminations on this idea include a Greek word that’s been playing in the back of my mind as a vague memory from seminary classes long ago. The word is *anamnesis*, and I think of it as a rich and powerful notion. The first thought I had was in relation to the word “dis-member”, which means to take something apart, to break it up and scatter it about. Is there some sense in which to “re-member” means to bring it back together, to knit it up, and restore a wholeness, to gather in and heal and bind together? I think there is something of that, but I’ll also admit to eventually going to a book on my shelf that was written by one of my seminary professors, and finding there a much more explicit definition of the word *anamnesis*: he writes that it is a recollection of the past that enlivens and empowers the present. To remember something doesn’t just take us to the past, but it also brings the power and the reality of that event into the present. In the Passover Haggadah, Jews are urged to recite the events of the exodus from Egypt in such a way that every Jew can come to understand themselves as having come out of Egypt.

I think it’s some of that sense that Jesus had in mind, or the early church had in mind when Luke and Paul placed those words on Jesus’ lips. To remember Jesus when we break the bread and drink the cup at the table is not just to stir up a pleasant memory from the early days of our faith,

but it is also to change the present through the force and power of that remembering. It is in fact to bring Jesus into the present, and into the room, and into our lives in very real and dramatic ways. It is in a real and strong way to acknowledge that when we gather at this table, Christ is the host, not me, and not Lucy. We are stand ins. We are second class substitutes who hopefully can help you hear and see and feel the presence of the Christ who started this meal in the first place. He is still here, when we gather about the table, when we take the bread and hold the cup. Whenever and wherever we eat and drink in his name, when we live in the spirit with which he lived and served and loved and healed among us, when we do any of this in remembrance of him, he is present, alive, in the here and now.

This night we remember one of the most important, beautiful, devastating nights in the life of our faith – but in no way should it simply be a history lesson or a nostalgic field trip. We are here to remember the wondrous love with which Jesus lived and died; the well intentioned efforts of his closest friends who just couldn't get it together when he needed them most; who couldn't withstand their fear and their self-centeredness and their distracted one eye on their teacher, one eye on the noise in the streets. We're here to remember the harsh reality of a world that didn't like a truth teller who wouldn't bow and scrape before the people who thought themselves important. We remember all of that tonight, because it happened to Jesus – and it's still happening to far too many people in far too many places. And we remember it to recognize and own those parts of all of it that we see in ourselves. And in the face of all of that, we also remember the wondrous love and amazing grace with which Jesus met it all. God needs us to remember those parts. To keep them alive, to help them live in the present, to carry their power and their beauty into this world. In this service and in our living, let us do what we do in remembrance of him.

Amen.