

Explore the Bible: How do we remember?

April 12, 2017

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 30 focuses on Matthew 26:17-30.*

Every time I'm privileged to perform a wedding ceremony, I find one of the most meaningful parts of the service is the exchange of the rings. I emphasize those rings forever will be a witness to any person who sees them that each partner is committed in marriage to only one other person in the world.

Of course, everyone knows the rings themselves are not the bond of the marriage. What they are, however, is a symbol of the commitment of two hearts to each other. They represent something truly sacred in the eyes of God and man.

No Easter without the communion of suffering

There is no more significant way to remember the commitment of Christ to us in his death on the cross than by sharing the Lord's Supper. Symbolic though it might be, it is also a time of true communion in which fellow believers, celebrating the Lord's presence, remember we are bonded together, commune, in a fellowship of suffering with Jesus and with each other.

Taking the Supper helps us recall that, before there was an empty tomb, there was a cross to bear. There is no Easter without the communion of suffering. We forget that at great peril to the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

That's what makes the Lord's Supper so significant. Jesus not only

commanded the disciples to make preparation for the meal; he also invited them to sit with him at a common table and share the meal together. With the Supper, Jesus not only was symbolically demonstrating the meaning of his impending appointment with the cross, but also was inviting the disciples to share in his sufferings. They didn't understand that at the time but soon would.

Join Jesus in a life of suffering

The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to do two things. First, it is an invitation to a life of suffering with Jesus. If following Jesus has never cost us anything, we would do well to ponder whether we are truly following Christ, to remember that the only way to the resurrection is by way of the cross.

The prosperity gospel is a dangerous perversion of the gospel. Jesus calls us to a good life, not an easy life. When anyone promises that the choice to follow Jesus defines "the abundant life" in terms of material gain, they are making promises that Jesus never made. The abundant life is the life we experience when our abundance is defined in terms of meaning and purpose and courage. Nothing more fully demonstrates that calling than taking the Lord's Supper.

The wedding vows state the promise of one person to another to remain faithful in all circumstances of life, in sickness or health, in poverty and wealth. In other words, the vows supersede the changing circumstances of life.

We should allow the taking of the Lord's Supper that, in doing so, we are reaffirming our vows to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.

Recognize God's forgiveness has no limit

The second thing Jesus demonstrates in the Lord's Supper is that his

forgiveness is unlimited. It's nothing short of stunning to note that, even though Jesus knew his traitor was taking the Supper with him, he finished the Supper with him anyway. Was Jesus saying that his forgiveness extended even to his betrayer? "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (v. 28).

Judas would not be the only person at the table that night who would betray Jesus. Peter would also deny Jesus just when Jesus needed his loyalty and faithfulness most. As the gospel story unfolds, we come to know it was the faith Peter proclaimed, and later betrayed, upon which the church would be built (Matthew 16:13-20).

Even though we have all failed Jesus, even denied him perhaps, there is still room for us at the Holy Table. If that isn't amazing grace, we would be hard pressed to discover what that might be.

Peter lived long enough to discover that grace. The sad thing for Judas is that he didn't stick around long enough to see what Jesus could make of his betrayal.

This Jesus follower takes great comfort in knowing his hands, which have not always been faithful instruments to God, are still invited to dip the bread in the Lord's cup. Paul reinforces that grace in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. He reports: "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.'" On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gave his all.

It's worth it to pause and think about the meaning of those words. Jesus, as a matter of actual fact, didn't die only for people who always got it right. Jesus died on the cross for all, even those who would promise to follow him and then betray him, so they might discover the true meaning of grace.

As we take the Supper, we are compelled by our faith in Christ to follow

him, even though it will be costly to do so. We also are compelled to remember that, if Jesus forgave those who would betray him even before they actually did so, we are compelled to forgive those who betray us.

If Jesus forgives us, we have no right ever to withhold forgiveness from anyone who has betrayed us. Taking the Supper symbolically reminds us of what Jesus has done for us. How we live out the meaning of that Supper is the true test of the commitment of our hearts.

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