

Explore the Bible: Remembered

April 5, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 25 focuses on Luke 22:7-20.*

A dear friend asked me to fill the pulpit for him on Easter Sunday. His granddaughter was being baptized in her home church, and he needed to be there.

The tiny church where he serves as interim pastor is about 100 miles from our home. As we made our way down the road, we were overwhelmed by how quickly spring has come and carpeted the roadside in bluebonnets. In my opening prayer I thanked God the renewal of nature reminds us of how God always brings death to new life.

The tiny church in which I preached was built in 1924. Because its active membership has fallen so precipitously and aged so greatly, they have voted to close the church this coming August, disband the membership and sell the facilities. They simply cannot go on as a viable congregation any longer.

At the end of the service, I acknowledged to the five or six in attendance that it's only natural they should grieve the closing of the church. Some of them, even in their late 80s, have never attended another church. There is no way to count the number of baptisms, weddings and funerals that have taken place in that building.

Community matters

I went on to encourage the folks to do what they can to retain their faith community, even if they no longer gather for worship. They will need each other now more than ever. Even if the church building ceases to exist, they

will still need their faith community.

An Episcopal priest friend of mine once said that we Baptists don't talk much about community. He was not being unduly critical, and I have never forgotten his gracious critique.

Long before a church is anything like an institution, it is first and foremost a community. Jesus reminded us of that with one of his last acts before he was crucified. His words to his disciples as they gathered for the last meal together drive it home: "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

"Do *what* in remembrance?" might be a natural next question. As age closes in and faith grows, it appears Jesus was talking to the disciples about more than the wine and the bread. Jesus was talking about community.

The cup and bread were powerful word pictures, more than two centuries old now among Christians. Since our earliest days, many of us remember the taste of the grape juice and the stale cracker. We also remember their meaning. By receiving and consuming those elements, we represent our receiving the living Christ into our lives.

Important to our faith

One critique of how most Baptists took the Lord's Supper in this writer's memory is how rarely we took it—usually only once a quarter and on Sunday night. That means a large part of our church family never took the Supper.

We were meant to remember Jesus' sacrifice more often. We remember what we do more than what we say. Receiving the Supper is one of the most significant ways to remember Jesus, by what we do, not simply by what we say.

Many Baptist churches now take the Supper at least once a month and on Sunday morning. Some even receive the Supper more often. Jesus never mentioned a requirement about how often we should share the Supper, just that we take it and always let it be a witness to the heart of our faith.

There seems to be something more here that Jesus expected us to remember. He didn't exactly say it. He simply did it and, in doing so, taught us a deeper meaning to the Supper, beyond the elements.

Jesus gathered the disciples together for the Supper. He obviously believed taking the Supper, in community, is also vital to our faith.

The size of the community is irrelevant. I've served the Supper to homebound hospice patients at their bedside with only their spouse present. It was a small community, but it was a community of faith nonetheless.

Jesus gathered the disciples together for the Supper as if to say: "You're going to need each other now more than ever. Gather, share the elements, and by doing so never forget me and never forget the others who share and help sustain your faith."

The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented the gathering of churches across the world. My wife and I haven't been able to attend our home church for more than a year now. It's beginning to hurt. Too much of what it means to be a Jesus follower means being with others who are also trying to be followers. My faith has begun to feel the anemia of aloneness.

If there is a silver lining in this horrible pandemic, it might well be that it has served as an in-your-face reminder of how much our faith is a community faith. Scripture challenges us "not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day coming."

Jesus reminded us to remember him, and how much we need one another. And to practice remembering it all.

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