

**“Remember”**  
**Exodus 12: 1-14**  
**September 7, 2008**

Human beings love ritual. You might never have thought of it this way, but pretty much every single day of your life is defined by a series of rituals that make you who you are.

There are daily rituals, like the way that we get dressed and the way that we eat our food. For instance when I am getting ready in the morning, it always goes exactly like this: I get out of bed, put on my glasses, use the bathroom, and take my shower. Then it's over to the sink where I apply deodorant to my stinky pits, floss and brush my teeth, and slop some goop in my hair. Then I get dressed. I put on my undies, left sock, right sock, shirt, pants, belt, and shoes, always in that order. It never changes, it is my morning ritual, and I'll bet that you have one too.

Some of us have eating rituals as well. For example when my son Nicholas was little, none of the foods on his plate were allowed to touch one another, and he had to have a different utensil for each food. And then there is my Mom's favorite television show, *“Everybody Loves Raymond,”* where Raymond's brother Robert ritually or habitually touches his food to his chin with each and every bite that he eats.

In addition to our daily rituals we have annual rituals as well. We have particular places where we go on vacation at certain times of the year. We have holidays and other special occasions when we gather with specific people in particular places to do certain things that never, ever vary. For some of us, there are certain foods that just have to be present on the Thanksgiving table. And for many others, it's just not Christmas if certain traditions are not in place.

We love these rituals because they bring a sense of order to our lives. They bring us some sense of comfort and offer us the illusion that we are in control of things. But most important of all, we love these rituals because they make us remember.

At our house, we have to have broccoli casserole for Thanksgiving dinner because it reminds us of mom, who has always made it that way. And we always put a red bow on the top of the Christmas tree because it takes Nancy

and me back to our first Christmas together when a simple red bow was all that we had to top our tree. We all love our rituals along with the meaning and memories that they provide.

But nowhere is ritual more important in our lives than it is in the observance of our faith. Much like our lives lived outside of this place, our Christian lives are also filled with an infinite number of everyday rituals that mark the course of our days, as well as all of those annual rituals that mark the course of our years. And in many cases there is a great connection between the everyday and religious rituals of life. In fact on Friday afternoon as I was eating lunch at the hospital while visiting my mom, I was joined by three employees who launched into a conversation about their Catholic and Jewish families and the traditions that shaped their lives.

In the Christian Church we observe seasons like Advent and Lent, and we celebrate holidays like Easter and Christmas. In fact, every single Sunday of the Christian year is guided by a lectionary calendar that specifies particular readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, a Gospel, as well as a reading from one of Paul's letters.

In addition to the scripture readings, our Sunday worship is also filled with a whole variety of other rituals as well. We sing certain songs, we pray certain prayers, we stand up at certain times and sit down at others (sort of like our own little sacred version of "Simon Says"). In fact, we are so ingrained in our sense of ritual and routine on Sunday morning that many of us even sit in the exact same seat week after week and year after year. When you think about it, everything that we do on Sunday morning is a form of ritual.

Like the rituals of our everyday life, the rituals of Christian worship are also intended to help us remember. We see an example of this sort of ritual created to induce remembrance in our scripture lesson this morning. The telling of the Passover from Exodus 12 recounts the story of the night when God caused the spirit of death to pass over the children of Israel as the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the killing of the first born children, was visited upon the Egyptians just before the Israelites headed off for the promised land. And so in order to remember that event, the yearly celebration of Passover was instituted.

Still today, year after year, Jewish families all around the world sit together around the table to celebrate the Passover with the Seder supper. There are certain foods served in a specific order, each one with its own symbolic

reference to the Passover story. And all through the meal there is a series of questions that the children ask the father of the house that lead them through the story of the Passover. And so each year when families gather together around the table, the Seder meal helps them remember the Passover event, which in turn enables Jewish folks everywhere for all time to remember God's love and grace as shown on that dark night in Egypt.

As Christians we also have a ritualistic meal that reminds us of God's love and grace as well. In fact, we're going to share it together here in just a couple of minutes. Like the Seder, it uses particular foods and words to help those gathered around the table to remember an actual event that expresses God's love, grace, and forgiveness. That ritualistic meal is of course the Lord's Supper, our remembrance of the last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his apostles. This morning we are going to look at a handful of things that it calls us to remember.

First of all, the Lord's Supper helps us remember our need. It was Paul who wrote of "*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*" [Romans 3:23-24] When we gather at the Lord's Table we are reminded that we are all in need of forgiveness. No one of us is any better or any worse than anyone else. None of us is perfect, yet all of us are forgiven by God. And that's the second thing that we remember at the Lord's table: God's love and forgiveness.

A lot of people today seem to have the impression that our God is an angry, capricious God and that God's people are equally judging and unforgiving. However, we who gather at this table this morning know a different story altogether. Far from angry and vindictive, our God so loved the world—God so loves us—that God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to live and to die for love. And so we are reminded that our forgiveness was won with a price. God sent Jesus, and Jesus gave up his life in order that we might understand both the depth of God's love, as well as the power of God's forgiveness to change the world.

And all this serves to remind us that when we leave this table, we do so as changed people. All this love, grace, and forgiveness softens our hearts, changes our lives, and calls us to leave the table as new creatures in Christ seeking to take that love and grace into the world around us sharing it with

everyone we meet, allowing the message conveyed at the Lord's supper to change the world through our lives and love.

And so, as we gather at this table, remember that while you are far from perfect, that doesn't make you any better, or any worse, than anyone else. Remember, God loves you with a love that is willing to forgive you of any and every wrong thing that you have ever done in your life. Remember, this forgiveness was won at a price. And finally, remember that God's love, grace, and sacrifice calls you to carry that same powerful love into the world outside.

Come to the table and remember. Amen.