

Remembering: Back to the Future

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Texts: Exodus 16:9-21 and Mark 14:12-26

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One of the ideas in the movie, *Back to the Future*, is that with the aid of the modified DeLorean, Marty and Doc can travel through time: from the present to the past and then back to the future. It is a great concept for the series of movies.

Who wouldn't want the ability to travel through time? To be able to see and experience different times and cultures? To use those excursions into the past to gain a deeper understanding of the human condition in the present. And to be able to plan for the future based on those things learned?

That is what is available to all Christians when they gather at the Lord's Table.

In discussing the supper, Jesus told his disciples to "do this in remembrance of me." This remembering at the table of Jesus Christ is where the past, present and future all intersect.

As we look at the Scriptures for this morning, consider how the Lord's Supper takes us *Back to the Future*.

The Old and New Testament passages for this morning are Exodus 16:9-21 and Mark 14:12-26.

Old Testament Scripture Readingⁱ

Exodus 16:9-21

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’” ¹⁰ And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹² “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” ¹³ In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” ¹⁷ The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with

them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

New Testament Scripture Reading Mark 14:12-26

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” ¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.” ¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, “Surely, not I?” ²⁰ He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he

gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ⁱⁱ

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Last week we looked at the Jewish celebration of Passover and how that ritual of remembering the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt was the backdrop for the last meal Jesus had with his disciples.

We saw how the themes of freedom, salvation and God’s grace and mercy were present in the Passover meal and how those ideas were still present in the new meal instituted by Jesus at that last supper.

Both the Passover and the Lord’s Supper served to unify a people around a meal of remembrance.

Today’s goal is to expand our understanding of remembrance and how that impacts our understanding of Holy Communion.

If you look at many of the recorded prayers in both the Old and New Testaments, you will see that they tend to follow a pattern.

As described by Constance M. Cherry in her book, *The Special Service Worship Architect*,

It is interesting that the early Christian prayers around the Table were modeled after the *berakhah*—an ancient Jewish prayer form that blesses God and expresses thanks for the care and provision of God’s people. *Berakhah* is translated in the New Testament as *eucharistia* (thanksgiving) or *eulogia* (blessing). It has been and remains the principal prayer form in Jewish liturgy and spirituality. The *berakhah* fosters the disposition of wonder coupled with praise. In time the prayer form became standardized into three essential movements: praise, recitation of God’s saving acts, and petition.ⁱⁱⁱ

Praise, Recitation of God’s Saving Acts, and Petition.

These are important concepts – keep them in mind throughout this morning.

When we look at Mark 14, we see the abbreviated version of the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. We see Jesus giving thanks to God and sharing the bread and the

cup with the disciples. What we have recorded is the core essentials for the celebration of Christian Communion.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we are joining with the believers of all times and places, past, present and future, in giving thanks to God for God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. That is no small thing.

The Past.

Our Celebration of Communion connects us with the earliest of Christian practices. Our celebration of Communion connects us with the earliest examples in Scripture of God's Grace and Mercy.

Let us look at the beginning of our Service for Holy Communion. We begin with a prayer we call the Great Thanksgiving.

As described by Constance Cherry,

The Great Thanksgiving is a eucharistic prayer with ancient roots that has developed over centuries and is still used widely today. It is called the Great Thanksgiving because the giving of thanks is the theme of the prayer throughout. It is truly a prayer of praise to God for all of God's activity in the world....^{iv}

One of the earliest writings of The Great Thanksgiving is from the beginning of the third century. It may sound a bit familiar.

The Lord be with you.
And with your spirit.
Lift up your hearts.
We have them with the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord.
It is proper and just.

We give thanks to you God, through your beloved son Jesus Christ, whom you sent to us in former times as Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your Will, who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all, and in whom you were well-pleased, whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a virgin, who, being conceived within her, was made flesh, and appeared as your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin...^v

Praise, Recitation of God's Saving Acts, and Petition.

We recognize the mighty acts of God for God's people. We trace our faith back to Abraham and Issac and Jacob. We trace our faith back to Moses and the Israelites being delivered from Slavery. We trace our faith back to Isaiah and Jeremiah and the other prophets who gave the people of God reason for repentance and understanding of God's salvific acts on their behalf.

We trace our faith back to Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection on our behalf.

We remember and give thanks for – the Past.

Praise, Recitation of God's Saving Acts, and Petition.

Let me step away from the sermon for a moment and clarify some terminology that is about to come up.

When someone throws a dinner party, we refer to that person as the host.

In the context of communion, some Christian Faiths refer to the bread of communion as the host.

As Presbyterians, when we refer to Jesus being the host, we mean he is the one who prepared the table and invited us to participate in Communion.

The Present.

We begin each observance of Holy Communion with an Invitation to Communion.

Since this is the meal instituted by Jesus, we see Jesus as the host, the one who has set the table. Because it is Jesus, not us, who is the host or server of this meal, in the Presbyterian Church, everyone who wants to participate in the Celebration of Communion is welcome at Jesus' table.

When we come to the table in this present moment, we come with all of who we are. We come with our failures and our triumphs, we come with our sorrows and our celebrations.

When we come to the table in this present moment, we ask for God to grant us peace and comfort. We ask for God to grant us solitude and community.

When we come to the table in this present moment, we ask for God to transform our very selves into the people God has called us to be.

We recognize that Communion is a both a solemn occasion and an occasion of celebration. It is a solemn occasion because Communion is the observance of Jesus' death on the cross. Communion is an occasion of celebration because Communion is also the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We find both pain and suffering and freedom and salvation at the table of Jesus Christ.

We remember - because the past has transformed our very present selves – individually and as a community of believers.

We remember and give thanks for – the Present.

Praise, Recitation of God's Saving Acts, and Petition.

The Future.

We have gathered at the Table of Jesus Christ to remember.

We have given thanks to God for all of God's acts of grace and mercy throughout history – those recorded in Scripture and those experienced by people from all times and places.

We have recognized our very present need – both as individuals and as communities of faith – for God's grace and mercy through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The ***table is more*** than a view to the past and a recognition of petition for the present.

The table, Jesus' table, gives us a much-needed lens into the future.

Look at verses 22-25 again:

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Pay special attention to verse 25: "²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

We have a view of the future in these ancient words from our Savior.

Jesus provides a promise that the Kingdom of God, which Jesus ushered in the beginning of with his life, death and resurrection, is still to be completed.

The promise of God is that there is more than this life. We do not know when or how the Kingdom of God will be brought to completion, but we do know that Jesus promises to be with us there.

In the future.

In a few moments we will gather at the Lord's Table. Look for the elements of **Praise, Recitation of God's Saving Acts, and Petition.**

Let us travel from this very present moment, back to the future.

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ⁱⁱ New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cherry, Constance M. The Special Service Worship Architect (p. 151). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Cherry, Constance M.. The Special Service Worship Architect (p. 171). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^v <https://anglicancompass.com/the-great-thanksgiving/>.