

Title: "An Invitation to Remember"

Text: Luke 22:14-19; Deut. 16:1-3

"Do this in remembrance of me."

Our invitation from God today is an invitation to remember.

- It's an invitation to come to this table and to eat this bread
 - in remembrance of Jesus' body, given for us;
 - and to drink from this cup in remembrance of his blood that was shed for us.

But did you know that the word "remember" also occurs about 450 other times in the Bible.

- God invites his people to remember:
 - that they were slaves in Egypt;
 - that He led them out of Egypt by his powerful right hand;
 - that He brought them through the Red Sea on dry land;
 - that He led them 40 years in the wilderness;
 - that He provided manna from heaven and water from the rock;
 - that He brought them into the land of promise;
 - that He delivered them from the hands of surrounding kings and enemies.

God is constantly inviting His people to remember His loving kindness and faithfulness to them generation after generation.

And many times God invites his people to do their remembering by means of a feast.

- As we read a moment ago from Deuteronomy, he invites them to remember the escape from Egypt,
 - by celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread culminating in the Passover Seder meal.

They would get rid of all the leaven in their homes to remember how when they escaped from Egypt they had to eat unleavened bread,

- because they couldn't wait for the dough to rise before baking it.
- They had to leave in a hurry.
 - So they remembered by a Feast of Unleavened Bread.

And they remembered the final plague on Egypt which finally convinced Pharaoh to let the people go:

- That the Angel of Death passed over Egypt killing all of the first born sons in every home.
- But the Israelites were spared that horror, because they had sacrificed a lamb and put the blood of the lamb over the doors of their homes.
- And when the Angel of Death passed over, He saw the blood of the lamb and left those homes alone.

So God invites His people to remember by eating a Passover Meal every year, in which they retell the story,

- and eat a lamb and drink cups of blood-red wine in remembrance.

It was at just such a Passover Meal that Jesus took the unleavened bread and broke it for his disciples,
-and took the cup of wine and passed it to his disciples,
-inviting them to add to their remembrance, His own sacrificial offering to be accomplished for them the following day at the cross

It was there that He became our Passover Lamb, dying in our place so that the Angel of Death might “pass-over” us,
-if his atoning blood is sprinkled over us.

But there are so many other feasts of remembrance in the Bible.

- The Feast of Tabernacles to remember how the Israelites lived in tents for 40 years in the wilderness.
- The Harvest Feasts First Fruits and Pentecost.
 - Two feasts which invited the people to remember how God had brought them into a fertile land,
-and continued to provide them with abundance.
- The Feast of Purim to remember how God had saved his people from slaughter during the time of the Exile,
-when Esther courageously defended her people before King Xerxes, in the face of the hated Haman who sought to destroy them.

Do you see how the feasts of God’s people were related to the history of God’s people?

They were invitations to remember....to remember their story.

But they were invitations from God, inviting His people to remember their story in a particular way.

- God was inviting them to remember their story through the lens of His redeeming grace,
- and so to celebrate their story with a feast.

And I want to highlight this today, because the stories of the life of God's people were not nice stories.

- They were painful stories.
- Slavery in Egypt was painful,
- 40 years in the wilderness was not fun,
- entering the promised land to face battle after battle to take the land was dangerous and deadly for many,
- being under constant attack from enemies to keep the land was a constant pressure,
- suffering times of famine and drought,
- being carted off into exile in Babylon.
- Coming back to the promised land to find it all in ruins, and then being subjugated by the Romans.

The history of God's people is full of pain and heartache, suffering and sin.

- It would be very easy for God's people in any age to do their remembering from a place of bitterness.
- It would be easy to remember their stories and be resentful.

It's even crazy that Jesus, on the night he is betrayed, and the night before he is to go to the cross,

- takes the bread and cup and asks his disciples to remember that night, and the events of the next three days, as an act of worship and thanksgiving.

It's crazy because those next three days would be the worst days of their lives.

- Jesus would be arrested, tried, convicted, crucified.
- All their hopes and dreams for the coming of God's Kingdom would seem to them to be crushed.

Why would they want to remember those days again and again?

Why would they want to continually take bread to remember
Jesus' broken body on a cross,
-and a cup to remember his blood poured out?

It was because of the ultimate resurrection and redemption of
God that was accomplished there at the cross.

You see, all of these events are meant to be remembered,
-not for the very real pain of the moment,
-but for the ultimate deliverance of God which was born out
of the pain.

God calls us to remember not only the death and dying, but
also the resurrection.

-And He does this so that we might learn to understand our
own stories in the larger context of His redemption, too.

We remember these stories of the Bible because they remind
us of what it looks like to trust God
-through all the tumultuous journeys of our lives.

We do these things "in remembrance" because they remind us
of who we are, and who we belong to.

-They remind us that we are not alone in all the ups and
downs of life,
-but God is with us, and He is in the process of
redeeming us from all the brokenness around us and
in us.

And when we forget, we end up feeling lost and alone.

-We forget that we are God's sons and daughters.

-We forget that He is working all things together for the good
of those who love Him.

-We forget that He is sovereign and able to save,

-and we feel like the waves of life will simply overwhelm us.

So God invites us to remember.

-And He invites us to remember with feasts and celebrations.

-He invites us to recall the painful events of our life's stories in
the remembrance of His great goodness and faithfulness,

-as he showed up in those horrible times to deliver us.

And those moments of deliverance become our own Exodus stories.

- Those times when he raises us from the dead become our own resurrection stories.

This past week we connected with my niece Chrissy and her son, Wesley, who live now down south of Atlanta, GA.

- Chrissy just had her 40th birthday this week, so we sent her some flowers, and emailed back and forth.

Some of you may remember that 5 years ago Chrissy's husband Jim shot himself,

- and she came home to discover his body.

He was a captain in the US Army, and had served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan,

- and was preparing to deploy again to Afghanistan.

- We don't know what went on in him, but he made a decision to not go back.

It was a horrible decision for all of us.

- It devastated Chrissy and Wesley, and all of us.

- Chrissy's move to the Atlanta area was an attempt to get away from all the places she knew, and start a new life.

- I wasn't sure that was a very good decision either,

- but I'll tell you what, God has done an amazing work in Chrissy and Wes's life over these past few years.

He led them to be part of a church community that has been so good for them.

- They have had help processing all that happened to them, -and they have grown in their faith, and their love.

- Their grief has enlarged their souls, rather than shriveling their souls.

- We can't believe what a transformation has taken place in them, and how God has brought forth resurrection of life.

It's Chrissy's Exodus story, and Wes's, and a new story of resurrection for our whole family.

And each of you have those stories in your lives.

- Times when God showed up for you, and helped move you from bondage to freedom,

- from addiction to liberation,
- from pain to healing,
- from loneliness to companionship,
- from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh,
- from deep sorrow to a deeper joy.

Those are our Exodus stories.

- Personal stories of how in some small way or large way,
 - you were wounded by life, and cried to God for help,
 - and discovered He was there to deliver and redeem.

And your Exodus story was no fun at the time.

- It cost you. It wounded you. It brought you to the end of yourself.
- But somehow God brought you through to a place of some kind of resurrection.

And He invites you now, to see your story of redemption connected to the Bible's whole story of redemption.

- He invites you to remember and to come to His table to celebrate the feast of His redeeming grace.

So let's take a moment now to respond to God's invitation and remember.

- We will take a minute or two of silence, and I'd like us all to ask the Holy Spirit to bring to our remembrance
 - an Exodus or Resurrection story from your own life.
 - A time when you were lost or lonely or grieving or afraid or sick or suffering or at your wits end,
 - but in looking back now, you know you were not alone and you know that God somehow saw you through that dark valley and brought you out the other side.
- Then as we prepare for the table, perhaps a few of you could give a brief testimony and share your remembrance with us.

Let's be quiet for a moment together.