

“REVIVE #5: REMEMBER”

(Exodus 12:1-14)

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[Cornerstone UMC.; 10-1-23]

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1. [11am ONLY... Read CEB Text: Exodus 12:1-14 and Pray].

2. Today we're concluding our series REVIVE, using the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt to teach us lessons about what it will take for you and me to experience personal and corporate revival -- for us, like them, to find and live in our own "promised land."

A--Now, from these stories, we've learned that renewal/revival will require us to: (1) answer God's *call*, (2) trust God's *presence*, (3) claim God's *provision*, and (4) follow God's *direction*.

B--But today (on what we call "World Communion Sunday") in our scripture from Exodus 12, we also learn the importance of *MEMORY* as a tool for *perseverance*.

[9am ONLY... Listen to the the words of Verses 1-14: “1 *The Lord said to Moses & Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 “This month will be the 1st month; it will be the 1st month of the year for you. 3 Tell the whole Israelite community: On the tenth day of this month they must take a lamb for each household, a lamb per house. 4 If a household is too small for a lamb, it should share one with a neighbor nearby. You should divide the lamb in proportion to the number of people who will be eating it. 5 Your lamb should be a flawless year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 You should keep close watch over it until the 14th day of this month. At twilight on that day, the whole assembled Israelite community should slaughter their lambs. 7 They should take some of the blood and smear it on the two doorposts and on the beam over the door of the houses in which they are eating. 8 That same night they should eat the meat roasted over the fire. They should eat it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 Don't eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over fire with its head, legs, and internal organs. 10 Don't let any of it remain until morning, and burn any of it left over in the morning. 11 This is how you should eat it. You should be dressed, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. You should eat the meal in a hurry. It is the Passover of the Lord. 12 I'll pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I'll strike down every oldest child in the land of Egypt, both humans and animals. I'll impose judgments on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 13 The blood will be your sign on the houses where you live. Whenever I see the blood, I'll pass over you. No plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 14 “This day will be a day of remembering for you. You will observe it as a festival to the Lord. You will observe it in every generation as a regulation for all time”]*

3. Now, here we've done a "rewind" of the timeline, of sorts, because this story -- describing what's now known as the "Passover/Seder" meal of Judaism,¹ which is also the origin of our Christian sacrament of Holy Communion/Lord's Supper/Eucharist -- actually takes place *before* either the exodus *or* the wilderness wanderings.

A--Yet, I've included it in this series about revival because -- in the giving of this ritual -- I believe God gave the Hebrew people a *tool* to help get them *through* the challenges, struggles, and exhaustion that He knew they would have to face *during* the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and even *after* they reached the "promised land." ²

B--Of course, when you and I consider the idea of "revival," *ritual* is NOT the first thing most of us think of! Ritual, most of us tend to think, is something that's dull, boring and lifeless, *not* something that brings life, energy, or renewal.

C--Interestingly enough, though, most of the great spiritual revivals of Christian history have included a renewed interest in (and practice of) the main rituals of our faith -- the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. ³

D--Why IS that? How is it that *ritual* can be a tool for *revival*?

4. Well, I want to suggest today that in this story, *God* knew -- perhaps *better* than the people of Israel, and even better than *us* -- that spiritual life growth requires *structured memory* in order for it not only to *exist* but also to *thrive*.

A--In this case, the "Passover/Seder" was given (or "instituted", as we sometimes more formally say) to be God's way of helping the people to REMEMBER His presence *so that* they could *persevere* through whatever they were facing -- how does God put it in Verse 14?... "*This day will be a day of remembering for you.*"

B--And the verse then goes on to say that the people were encouraged to "*observe it in every generation as a regulation for all time*" -- in other words, *unlike* the pillars of cloud & fire, the manna, & water from the rock in the exodus & wilderness journey, *this* ritual was to be practiced even *after* they were living in the "promised land."

C--Why? So that they would REMEMBER God's presence and work... not only during the exodus and wilderness wanderings, but also long after the emotional euphoria of those things had faded.

5. So do you see the point here? The "Passover/Seder" was all about **REMEMBERING**. ⁴

A--Interestingly, the word "*remember*" (or some variant of it) appears 550 times in the Bible (44 times in the book of Psalms alone!).

B--Obviously, *God* knew that we humans need *reminding* of His power and presence, so He gave the people a ritual for them to remember Him *not only* when they faced times of challenge, struggle, and exhaustion, but also so they wouldn't forget Him when they were experiencing *good* times, too.

1--I used to have a seminary professor who said "*If something is important it gets repeated. If something is important, it gets repeated. If something is important, it gets repeated. If something is important, it gets repeated.*"

2--Do you get it? Well, the Bible repeats many themes over and over again (like love, grace, forgiveness, faith, "do not fear," etc.) because these themes are *important*, and their repetition over and over in scripture highlights this. ⁵

3--So, God told the people of Israel to observe the Passover "*for all time*" for the same reason -- to give them a tangible *reminder* of His faithfulness in the *past*, so that they could persevere in the *present* and into the *future*.

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6. Well, this is precisely how (and why) God uses ritual today -- as a tool for structured memory; as a way to REMEMBER God's power and presence in the *past*, so that you and I can persevere in the *present* and into the *future*, as well.

A--Just as the Passover/Seder meal provided the people of *Israel* strength, hope and a reason to persevere through the challenges and difficulties of their exodus and wilderness wanderings,...

B--...so the Sacrament of Holy Communion is designed to give strength, hope and a reason to persevere *to us today as Christians*, so that when *we* face the challenges, changes, and difficulties of our world, we (like them) will remember that none of *us* is alone -- that God is constantly with us.

7. And just as the Passover/Seder continues to remind our Jewish friends today of God's faithfulness and presence long after the exodus and wilderness wanderings themselves,...

A--...So for us as Christians, ***World Communion Sunday*** reminds us not only of the spiritual oneness we share with God's *people* around the world, but also of the faithfulness and presence of God *Himself* long after the emotionalism and adrenaline rush of any *outward* revival has faded away.

B--How does Jesus put it in after blessing the elements in Luke 22:19?... "*Do this in remembrance of me*" -- as in the Passover/Seder, in Holy Communion the bread and juice, are -- among other things -- tangible reminders of God's love & faithfulness, and therefore are also an invitation and encouragement to *persevere* in life.

C--A number of years ago when I was a seminary student at Emory's Candler School of Theology, there was a time I attended a chapel service when I was feeling stressed and overwhelmed about something.

1--I really don't remember what it was, and I don't even remember what the sermon was about, but I DO remember Holy Communion that day.

2--When I came forward to receive the elements, I dipped my bread in the juice, and as I lifted it towards my mouth, some of the red juice dropped and splattered on my hands, looking like blood.

3--As it did, I heard God speak in my spirit, "*Brian, this juice is my blood, given so you'll know that I am with you. So, don't give up. Hang in there. Hope in me by the power of my blood!*"

4--And that simple reminder of the power of hope through the *ritual* of Holy Communion got me through my challenges that day (and many others afterward), ...and it can do the same for you today, as well.

8. I don't know what problems from your *past* are chasing you (like the Egyptians chasing the Hebrews), or what *present* "wilderness" you're wandering through, or what unknown *futures* you're facing and perhaps fearful about.

A--But whatever they are, as we share today in this ritual (Holy Communion) that God has given us,...

B--...we're able to **REMEMBER** His presence and power, giving us strength and hope to *persevere* as we journey (individually and collectively) towards the "promised lands" of *our* lives.

C--And when we do that, we can experience true revival!

9. [PRAYER: "*O God, thank you for the gift of ritual--especially the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Forgive us for the ways that we sometimes use ritual simply to go through the motions of faith, and to forget how powerful and impactful these celebrations are meant to be in and for our lives. Instead, as we journey away from the mistakes of our pasts, through the wilderness times of change in our present, face the fears of our unknown futures, and even live lives of comfort and ease in our 'promised lands,' keep us mindful of your presence through the practice of living ritual, and how it has the power to equip us to persevere through all our journeys in life. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*"
10. [WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY HOLY COMMUNION]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Also called also the "*feast of unleavened bread*" (Ex. 23:15; Mark 14:1; Acts 12:3), because during its celebration no leavened bread was to be eaten or even kept in the household (Ex. 12:15). Today it is also known as the "*Seder*" meal in classic Judaism.

² To be fair, there is only one explicitly recorded celebration of this feast between the Exodus and the entrance into Canaan/the "promised land," namely, that mentioned in Numbers 9:5. But its practice is nevertheless implied during the wilderness wanderings in a number of places.

³ Examples of this include the revival movements of Martin Luther (Lutheranism), the 16th-century anabaptist movement, the 18th and 19th century Methodist revival (especially in England), and even the "Walk to Emmaus" renewal movement of today.

⁴ "To Remember" in Hebrew and Greek are: זָכַר (zakhar); and μνησκειω (mimnēskō). The Passover was actually just one of several important rituals of remembrance in ancient Judaism. Others included the weekly keeping of *Shabbat* (or "Sabbath"), and the annual pilgrimage festivals of *Weeks* (or "Pentecost"), and the festival of *Ingathering* (or "Booths"). These harvest festivals were celebrated with great ceremony (Num 10:10), and their observance eventually took on historical meaning.

⁵ *"Remembering is an action of both God and people. God remembers; the people remember. The people call upon God to remember; and God, through the prophets, admonishes the people to remember. Memory, the account of the actions of God on behalf of the people, is the fundamental shaping element of the faith of ancient Israel. Remembering is a communal activity through which identity and right living are realized and maintained"* (Nancy Declaiseé-Walford, article "Remember, To," in New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).