

April 9, 2020

Holy Week 2020

Why are Memorials Important?

Matthew 26:17-30

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important. Not a single week should be wasted. Have you every stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar, Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter.

This is Maundy Thursday, and so much has already happened. On Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that noble beast. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd, yet he was alone. On Monday, Jesus cursed the fig tree, the symbol of Israel. Later, he went to the temple and challenged the authority's priorities. In a rage, he turned the tables of the money changers over and reminded them that the temple was a place of prayer, not profit. On Tuesday, Jesus was confronted by the orthodox leaders of his faith and taught commoners about the Kingdom of God. On Wednesday, Jesus' enemies formulated a plan to eliminate him and Judas Iscariot agreed to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. On this day, Thursday, Jesus called the twelve together and washed their feet. It was an illustration of humility. The same humility we are to display as we serve others. Later that day, Jesus took the disciples to the upper room and gave them a memorial that should never be forgotten. It is that memorial that grabs our attention. Our scripture lesson is Matthew 26:17-30. Let me call this message this evening *Why are Memorials Important?*

**Matthew 26:17-30** On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>18</sup> He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" <sup>19</sup> So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. <sup>20</sup> When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. <sup>21</sup> And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup> They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." <sup>25</sup> Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so." <sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell

you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." <sup>30</sup> When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) once said, *"The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life."* If you find some value in communion said, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves this evening in the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew. Those must have been anxious days. The disciples didn't know exactly what, but they knew something big was about to happen. The time had come for the annual Passover meal. The scriptures say it clearly. Jesus did not spend that evening with his family, as many did. Jesus spend that evening with his disciples. They knew the ritual, yet they were in for a surprise. This is the truth. The disciples were about to learn something new and the disciples were about to experience something new. Let us look at both.

In these sacred verses, the disciples learn there was a traitor in their very midst. Jesus tells the disciples one of their own was a traitor. It could have been any of them. Each one had an opportunity, but the traitor ended up being Judas Iscariot. It must have been hard for them to accept. He may have been the most trusted disciple. Elsewhere in scripture, we are told he was group's treasurer. How severely has history judged Judas Iscariot? Many believe, he is the greatest traitor in the history of the world. You know the story. He so regretted betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, he took his own life. That must have hard for the other eleven to accept. At that Passover meal, the disciples learned someone new. Judas Iscariot was a traitor. Yet, there is more.

In these sacred verses, the disciples experience something new. It started off as the same old thing, but it ended up being something new. The scriptures call it the Passover meal. We call it the Seder. The meal itself became a teaching tool. Everything they ate symbolized something from their national's exodus from Egypt. Like all rituals, there is comfort in the familiarity. That comfort is broken when Jesus changed the ritual. Before the meal is complete, a new ritual is born. Jesus passes the bread and calls it his body. Jesus passes the wine and calls it his blood. Our tradition embraced this new ritual to the point it was called a sacrament, a means of grace. Sad to say, what was meant to unite believers has often divided believers. This evening, I want you to remember one thing about communion. Distilled down to its basic form. It is nothing more than a memorial. Jesus said it himself, "Do this in remembrance of me." Don't dismiss memorials. Appreciate what memorials are designed to do. This is the question you must answer. Why are memorials important? There are two reasons.

### **The Past**

First, memorials are important because they remind us of the past. In downtown Lexington, Kentucky is a memorial to Brig. General John Hunt Morgan. He was not really from Kentucky, but he was from Tennessee. In became famous during the Civil War when his Confederate cavalry unit covered 1,000 miles. Desperate to take the Civil

War into the north, "Morgan's Raiders" started in Tennessee, swept north into Kentucky, crossed the Ohio River and entered Indiana. Then, they made their way east into Ohio. They were finally stopped on July 26, 1863 in West Point, Ohio. Have you ever been to West Point, Ohio? It is just south of Lisbon so one day I decided to find the spot. It was hard to find but I found it. I stood at the memorial and looked at the view. Not much has changed in West Point since 1863. There must have been nothing there when Morgan was stopped because there is nothing there now. It was just the same, but the world, itself, has changed. How much has our world changed since 1863? How much has our world changed in 157 years? How much has medicine changed? How much has transportation changed? How much has communication changed? How much has America changed since 1863? How much has America remained the same since 1683? Let me ask you a harder question, "How much has our world changed in the past 2,000 years?" Every several years we do a "Living Last Supper." It is fun to see the men portray the disciples. With bad wigs, beards and robes, they recite their lines. The goal is to make it like the great painting, The Last Supper. It is a great experience for a church, but it is more important to remember the past. Memorials make us remember the past. Communion forces us to remember that night. It was just Jesus and the disciples. First, memorials make us remember the past.

### **The Important**

Second, memorials remind us of what is important. One of my favorite family pictures sits on my dresser. The picture is an old photograph. It is faded but I can still make out the images. I pick it up every day and look at it. My Aunt Phyllis tells me it is a photograph of an Adams family reunion. The year must be about 1900. The picture is not unique. You may have one of your own family. Everyone is sitting in front of a farmhouse. All the men have beards; all the women are wearing long dresses. The oldest are sitting on chairs in the middle. The youngest are sitting on the ground. There is a young boy sitting in front of the oldest man. That young boy is my grandfather, Roger Adams. He was the only one in that picture I ever met. Everyone in that picture is gone today. However, I look at that old faded photograph every day because they are family. The blood that was flowing in their veins is still flowing through my veins. Those strangers are family!

I like to think the core values of the generations that are represent are my core values. Not a single person in that old photograph is extremely handsome or rich. Not a single Adams ever invented something that changed the world or wrote a book that made a single individual think. They are just a collection of hard-working farmers from northeastern Ohio. However, being an Adams means certain things. First, it means you are a good person. In other words, your word means something. Second, it means you are honest Third, it means you are loyal. Loyal to your spouse, children, friends and country. Forth, it means you are a Christian. Adams have always been strong churchmen and believers. We understand Jesus is our only hope of salvation. We always have and I pray we always will. That is what is important to us. What is important to you?

Memorials remind us of what is important. Communion, a memorial, forces us to remember Jesus. It is impossible to partake of his body and blood and not think of him. Think about this next line. When we eat the bread and drink the juice Jesus becomes part of us. Communion forces us to remember the most important thing in life, Jesus! If you can agree with that say, "**Amen!**" Yet, there is one more thing communion does. It separates communion from all other memorials.

I read recently; 25 million people visit the National Mall in Washington DC annually. I have been there several times. It is a special place. I am humbled every time I go to Arlington National Cemetery and look at all the memorials, including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I love visiting the Lincoln Memorial. There is a sadness about the Vietnam War Memorial. I am unsettled when I walk thru the Korean War Memorial. I was moved the only time I walked to the Jefferson Memorial. I have visited Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial and the Martin Luther King Memorial. Someday, I want to go to the top of the Washington Memorial. I have seen the World War II Memorial. Can I be honest with you? They are all great, but none can hold a candle to the greatest memorial, the body and blood of Christ, communion. It doesn't just remind us of the past. It doesn't just remind us of what is important. It reminds us of eternity. Pope John Paul II wasn't wrong. He said, "*The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.*" May God bless us as we make this spiritual pilgrimage together.