

Re-Member
May 25, 2008
1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

When the plane landed at Reno NV, the passengers had to wait while a casket was unloaded. Looking out the windows, they couldn't see the casket below them. They watched a woman on the tarmac below, crying. They watched a man holding her up.

US Marines Major Steve Beck has had to do this for five years. His job is to notify a family when a soldier is killed. While every door is different, the scenes inside are always the same. He describes it: "The curtains pull away. They come to the door. And they know. They always know. You can almost see the blood run out of their body and their heart hit the floor. It's not the blood as much as their soul. Something sinks. I've never seen that except when someone dies. And I've seen a lot of death."

They're falling – either literally or figuratively – and you have to catch them. In this business, I can't save his life. All I can do is catch the family while they're falling."

The lady in the picture is Katherine Cathey. The man is Major Beck. When he and the chaplain went to her home, her mother began weeping. "She's pregnant", she cried. The crying woke Katherine from her nap. Her screams started when she saw the uniform.

He stays with them, often through the funeral. He represents us, our country, that cares about their grief.

He did that for Katherine Cathey, here in the picture. Since her husband Jim had been killed by a bomb, his body could not be shown. So, much of it was wrapped in a shroud and his dress uniform laid over it. In the funeral home, Major Beck took her hand and placed it on the uniform. She pressed her hand against the uniform and the body. She dragged her hand the length of all that was there.

The people on that plane will likely not forget the scene of a soldier and wife watching a casket. We will not forget those who have died in war, and the families they have left behind.

Today we remember.

We remember those who died fighting a war.

We remember those of our church who died in the past year.

We remember Jesus. He told us to.

I want you to understand what he meant when he said "remember me". The greek word is anemnesis. And it means a lot more than thinking about something that happened a long time ago.

Anemnesis is bringing back the event. It is putting yourself in the place of the action. So the anemnesis of Jesus is redoing the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. A more literal translation than remember me is "do my anemnesis".

A soldier who returns to a battlefield puts himself in the place of the battle, the feelings come back, the smells, the sound of the cries of fear, the thoughts. The lessons learned years ago in battle are relearned. The gratitude for the heroism of friends that died so he could live, it is gratitude all over again. He is putting the battle back together again.

A body has parts called members. Arms, legs, etc. If they are cut off, like the Knight in Monty Python, and put back together again, it is re-membering the body.

United Methodist bishop Hee Soo Jung was our district superintendent a few years ago. Now he is the bishop who gave the sermon in the memorial service at the General Conference last month. He explained what “remember” means. He recalled how a criminal dying with Jesus pleaded, “Remember me.” The criminal wanted Jesus to restore him after death. “When Jesus remembers us, we are put back together again,” he said. When people remember those who have died, they are brought back together in the living body of Christ through the act of remembering.

When we take communion, we are putting the events of the last supper back together. Jesus is going through this suffering and death and resurrection so that we can be put right with God. We are going through the suffering and death and resurrection with him so that we can be raised up out of sin and death. It is happening here. Jesus is not in the past, but in the present.

Jesus said “Love as I have loved you.” So Jesus is doing that now, not just in the past, therefore we love now like the Father of the Prodigal Son, like the vineyard owner who paid what people needed, not what they earned. We love like the good shepherd who doesn’t give up on anybody. We love like the one who gave up power willingly.

The prophet says “remember the law of my Servant Moses” He doesn’t mean recall the 10 commandments you memorized in Sunday School or confirmation he means “obey the law, do the law”.

I quoted the Bible in the Baccalaureate service Thursday night. I said “Paul the Bible writer says” and then quoted the scripture. I didn’t say “Paul, the Bible writer said”. I used the present tense, not the past tense, because Paul is still saying it. That’s what the Bible’s word for “remember” means. The message, the belief, the action, is in the present, not the past.

Today we remember.

We remember those who died fighting a war.

We are not just thinking about dead soldiers and being glad they did it so we didn’t have to. We can put ourselves into their place, put back together the events so we feel what that sacrifice meant to the families of the ones who died. When we recreate that event, we are never the same. When we re-member the fallen, we want to stand, stand for what is right and just in America.

We remember those of our church who died in the past year. We are not just recalling that they lived, but we can put back together the family events, the family dinner table, the family holiday parties where they showed us how much they cared for us. When we re-member their lives, we are redoing the lessons they taught. The thriftiness, the creativity, the Sunday school teaching, the attention to grandchildren; it is all happening again in us. Memorials given in their name mean that their effect, their influence continues.

We remember Jesus.

Not just bringing up the facts, but reconnecting with Jesus. Those disciples were never closer to him than in that meal. We are again touching, hearing, holding, feeling his deep passion when he held up that bread and cup. We are more certain than ever that we can go through any suffering and death, because we trust he will carry us on to resurrection.

I've been to the upper room. There's a room in Jerusalem where Christians have commemorated the last supper for centuries, and very well could be the exact location of the event. But I didn't feel any closer to Jesus there than I do right here. Because Jesus is not there. Jesus is wherever his followers so deeply desire to be at that meal that they recreate it. And that is here. We will not just think about, but do the love, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, right here.