

Maundy Thursday – 2010 Exodus 12, 1 Corinthians 11, John 13

1) *How large is your memory?*

If it's your computer we're talking about, the answer's quick and easy.

You can measure it in gigabytes, terabytes, or even petabytes.

If your memory isn't big enough, you go and buy some more—memory is cheap.

How large is your memory?

If it's your brain we're talking about, the answer is more complex, isn't it?

It's no match for your computer as far as information storage and access are concerned.

But you can train your memory—memorize names, dates, numbers, places.

You can give your brain stimulating challenges to probe and puzzle over.

That's important when it comes time to take tests in school:

“I remembered everything on the list—I got 100—what did YOU get?”

No matter how old you are, your brain works better if you keep giving it workouts.

If you find your memory isn't big enough, you can take steps to bump it up;

after all, your memory is well worth investing in.

How large is your memory?

If it's heart-memory, soul-memory, spirit-memory we are talking about,
the question goes a lot deeper, doesn't it?

Much more is involved—in our deepest memories—than storing data, retrieving data,
and putting it together in different combinations.

2) A couple of Sundays back, Robin started us down this road—remember?

Our sense of smell is so strong. (She said.)

Smell links our emotions to memories in an instant.

Smells bring you back to so many places you have been before.

Some smells conjure up memories so painful you would just as soon forget them.

Some smells, however, you would bottle if given the chance.

Another form of strong, deep memory is what we call “muscle memory”.

You haven't ridden your bike for a long, long time.

You climb back up on it—wondering if you'll fall off and *hurt* yourself,

(or if you'll just fall off and make a *fool* of yourself).

But your body--it still remembers!

Off you go—a little wobbly at first—but the memory does come back.

All those patterns of behavior that make us particularly who we are—
they're not just mechanical or rote.

They carry layers upon layers of memory-stored meaning—

many of these layers well below the threshold of our conscious awareness.

When we take a look at what's beneath the surface, however,

many of these memories come bubbling right back up—

Fond memories, that, at times, we'd like to escape into—to run and hide within.
Memories we wish we could exorcise—haunting, bedeviling, paralyzing memories.
Memories (truth be told) we sometime don't mind nursing—
 resentments, grudges, tapes replaying tales of psychic wound and self-vindication.
Memories that, the *larger they get*, the *smaller we get*.
Selective memories—memories that cost us a great deal—that take a heavy toll.

BUT (thank goodness) we also have memories that seize us by the scruff of the neck,
 give us a shake, and catapult us to places where the air is brisk, the light is clear,
 the energy is centering, challenging, healthy.

These are selective memories too—but memories, that, as *they* get larger, so do *we*.
These memories are precious beyond price—
 because they are memories that just do keep on growing us.

Heart, soul, spirit memories are not matters of rote recall, or simple intellectual re-cognition.
They are vivid, visceral—vital to who we are, and to who we might become.
How large is your memory?

- 3) “*This day shall be a day of remember-ance for you,*” the ancient storytellers have Moses say
 as Israel’s children set forth on a long hard journey toward a new identity—
 a journey that will take them from being slaves to being free.

“... a day of remember-ance ...”

This Passover meal will become, for them, a tactile, visceral, muscle memory—
 the only thing that will prevent Israel’s children,
 from getting swallowed up in turbid seas of other, toxic memories.

Recording this old, old story, so that it can be told again
 during yet another period of their people’s cruel oppression and bitter enslavement,
 the writers of Exodus, deliberately deploy a selective memory,
 not just to *preserve* communal memory but to *enlarge* it.

God, you see, has a purpose for these people—
 a purpose they cannot serve,
 as long as they remain bedeviled by memories of their bondage.

- 4) “*This is my body that is for you. Do this in remember-ance of me.*”

Paul recounts these words of Jesus to his first disciples, as, from a distance,
 a worried Paul sends a stern letter to a community supposedly “Christian,”
 but one that is divided by the line between poverty and privilege,
 lower class and upper class, those disenfranchised and those entitled.

Paul repeats this line of Jesus, hoping it will sink into some hard Corinthian heads:
 “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remember-ance of me.”

A selective memory—a tactile, visceral, muscle memory—a redemptive memory.
A memory Paul thrusts forward to counter the Corinthians’ short sighted,
 short term memories—memories that, if they are not checked,
 will shrink, and shrivel, and be the death of the Christians in Corinth.

- 5) And Gospel writer John has Jesus look Peter straight in the eye,
and say to him in no uncertain terms: “*Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.*”
Jesus, with the ones he loves, is trying to enlarge their memories on the night before he dies.

Throughout John’s Gospel Jesus has been at work,
boldly imprinting indelible memories of life as God intends it:

- Providing wine for wedding guests, and bread for hungry people.
- Clearing worship space in a temple clogged with religious marketing strategies.
- Totally redrawing the spiritual maps for an insider Pharisee and an outsider woman of Samaria.
- Setting free a woman caught in adultery, a man trapped in blindness, a dear friend dead and buried—and then that man’s sister, who—when she washes Jesus feet—gets buried in an avalanche of unbridled scorn.

Can you imagine the power of the memories Jesus makes for all these people?
Not just positive memories, but centering memories, enlarging memories,
identity-transforming memories.

Every one of these people is one whom Jesus remembers.
And as they remember *being* remembered—they are all enlarged.

And now, one last time, with the ones he calls not his *servants*, but his *friends*,
Jesus does something far less dramatic (and far more).
Down he goes, on hands and knees, dousing tired, dirty feet, with cool, clear water.

No! No! No! You shouldn’t . . . I can’t . . . You mustn’t . . .! I won’t!

Yes, Peter, Yes . . . Please, please—Yes!

I know you don’t get it, Peter; but you really do need this—and so do I.

I’m not trying “to teach you a lesson” here . . .

But neither am I just doing a data entry you can access or not, as it suits you.

I am etching—not just upon you, but right alongside you—

a deep memory essential to the life we share together in the face of my impending death.

- 6) Washing feet—this is a deliberately selective, deliberately redemptive memory maker—
selected to inscribe a deep muscle memory of redeeming love.

Let me do this, Peter—not just TO you, or even FOR you—le me do it WITH you.

Without this act, we become dismembered. With this act, we enlarge each others’ memories.

So this we Christians have done from generation to generation.

And this we will do tonight.

Selectively enlarging our redemptive communal memory.

Re-member-ing--in Communion—

with the One who pours out *his* life in order to re-member *ours*.