

## ‘Do This in Remembrance’

It was a **Friday evening** & the other guests were arriving in the hotel restaurant. I was still trying to get accustomed to my new surroundings – which were quite unfamiliar to this Baptist minister! Before the meal, many of the guests stood with their families and said or sung their prayers.

For this memory is of a Sabbath evening meal in the King’s Hotel, Jerusalem back in Feb 1992 and Jewish families were remembering the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob – their God and my God too. It was a very moving sight & sound. I still recall it clearly although over 23 years ago since that first trip . To see and hear this public display of remembrance & worship showed that these people took their faith seriously.

### 1)‘Remembrance’:

is the first element that we find contained within those verses in Exodus chapter 12. ***‘When your children ask you, “What does this mean? Then tell them “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord “ ‘.***

That first impression of the Israelis was that they are a people who remember their past – the tour guide makes sure you are aware of it too. Of course, some remembrance can be very negative & nostalgic. *‘It’s not like the old days...it was all fields here when I was a kid..’* They say that even nostalgia isn't what it used to be!

But the kind of remembering going on in Ex.12 and here at this table this morning = a very different form of remembrance. It is one in which the **‘exodus’ (‘exit’ in Greece!)-** the deliverance event from the past - is brought into the present experience of those who share the meal together. So the remembrance is perpetuated – but it is an active remembrance that brings the past into the present.

And the God who was seen to have acted so decisively then, is also seen to be the same God, who is with his people right now, whatever their circumstances.

Our remembrance of Jesus here this morning must include the full story of his life – not just the events of his suffering & death. Here we recall the whole of God's plan for redemption – from Incarnation to Ascension. Our faith is rooted not in some cosy story that is okay for children & 'weak' people, who need that sort of thing to get them through the day/week/year/life. Our faith is rooted in the reality of a real person – God in human flesh for the world.

So to remember Jesus today, means for us his people gathered around this table, that Christ is vitally present here & now. Christ is vitally present in uniting us with himself & with each other. The question '*what does communion do for us?*' is a wrong one, in some senses. The real issue here is that we do THIS FOR HIM. He commanded it & that should be sufficient for us, shouldn't it?

Remembrance > **2)RITUAL:**

There is a great deal of ritual involved in this passage from Exodus. The Passover lamb, the sprig of hyssop, the blood on the door posts.

***'When you enter the land that the Lord has promised to give you, you must perform this ritual'***. And by so doing, the ritual was an aid to the remembrance.

**Rituals** are important to us – most premiership footballers these days, it seems – go through an elaborate ritual before stepping on to the pitch..cf. Cricketers on scoring a century & Andy Murray when he wins...

Rituals are all right when they act as a reminder to what is taking place. They can bring to mind all the deeper significance behind all the pomp & circumstance.

Rituals in church life are also important – recent experience on our cruise holiday - 'middle Sunday' in **Volos, Greece** – 'closed' on Sundays, but got off ship for an explore – two Greek Orthodox churches visited. 1<sup>st</sup> just at end of Communion – congregation's 'Exodus' eating chunks of bread & chatting! 2<sup>Nd</sup> – Infant Baptism - lots of ritual + lots of cameras!

So, too, this table set before us is a familiar part of our church life together. And Jesus commands us to do THIS in remembrance of him – to perform THIS ritual with THESE elements of Bread & Wine. Why so? Because Jesus wanted his followers to remember his death – *'this is my body broken > my blood poured out – for YOU.'*

So our Communion services – monthly – ensure that we never forget. Because the cross is the supreme demonstration of God's love for us. Wade St's building: *'A church at the heart of city, with Jesus at the heart of the church'.*

All many & various activities take place week by week – but at its CORE -**'This is a Church – This is where Jesus is remembered.'** (Ian's article in 'Vision')

***'How deep the Father's love for us.. The Father turns his face away...'*** Radio 4 'Sunday' programme quote- 'least favourite hymn' = that one, because of that line. Because, it was commented, the Father did no such thing...Sorry Stuart!

And before we get into deep theological waters on a Sunday morning, suffice to say once more, that at this table – each time we gather around it, so we remember that: ***'God loved the world so much...'***

As someone who used to be involved in the compiling of public acts of worship week in & week out, I was ever seeking ways of bringing new formats of prayers, readings, music.

And I quite enjoyed that challenge - not so as to appear trendy & 'up to date' - but rather to try to avoid the danger of putting myself & people of God into a ritualistic rut. For then it can appear that everything is the same, nothing happens & nothing is expected to happen.

All that can be the downside of 'ritual' – the plus of ritual is that a repeated & familiar act becomes the trigger to remembering God & identifying us as his people. And, although I said just now that we do THIS for Jesus – for HIS benefit, yet this ritual does also benefit us – by bringing before us each time – the supreme love of Jesus: ***'who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame.'*** (Heb.12v2).

Remembrance > Ritual >

### **(3) Redemption:**

***Then he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it & gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in memory of me."***

As we prepare to share in this familiar scene – meal together, what do we see? A routine part of our community life – it's the third Sunday morning, therefore it must happen. Or do we now come to a '**Holy Communion**' – literally sitting down with God to share a meal with him?

For here is a **remembrance** set in a **ritual** that recalls the greatest **redemption** of all through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ – instigator of the New Covenant – who says to each one of us: ***'Do this in remembrance of me.'***

And, as we now prepare to do so, it is Jesus himself who presides here.

As he broke the bread & offered the cup in that first meal – upper room – so he was about to go out into the blackness of Gethsemane > betrayal > trial > cross.

The moment of Passover in Exodus was a turning point in Israel's history. It was one filled with much uncertainty and fear – Moses himself had not wanted the job! *'Send somebody else!'*

And yet, throughout the following 'wilderness years', God showed time & again that he was with his people. Even when they rebelled against him, gave up on him, even wished themselves back in slavery in Egypt.

Different churches have different ways of how they celebrate this meal together. It even has different names – Holy Communion > Eucharist > The Lord's Supper > The Breaking of Bread...

Anglicans/Catholics will normally go to the front – communion rail – to receive bread & (real) wine from priest or church leader + words *'The Body > Blood of Christ'*.

Most (majority?) of Nonconformist churches use trays such as ours – individual glasses of non-alcoholic wine. I have vVarious memories of conducting Communion services down the years...From my first conducting of Communion at Limpley Stoke, Bath – in a small room (church heating had broken down) to the incident of the still 'frozen loaf' that I tried to separate!

At start of my 3<sup>rd</sup> & final ministry in Huntingdon, Cambs, I inherited their tradition of small 'bread cubes' cut up from a sliced, white loaf.

So I asked for a small (or even a large!) roll to actually break – words ***'this is my body broken for you..'***

Important & symbolic 'fracture' of the bread – whether or not congregation take from the 'one loaf' or a small cube...

The Brethren have very solemn morning meetings with no musical instruments, but apparently use port for the wine!

And in charismatic NFI/Pentecostal Churches, practice is often to pass bread & wine around from person to person, whilst congregation sing worship songs. Communion almost 'incidental'.

But however, whenever – the important point is that **we DO THIS...**

### **Remembrance > Ritual > Redemption:**

And so, as we go out from here into another week, we also recall that God has been with us – here – but also in all our wilderness times. We may face the uncertainty of tomorrow, next week, month, next year – as 2015 already in its 2<sup>nd</sup> half!

But we have met to do this once more in remembrance – of him who has promised that he will never desert us – whatever the future may hold – so let us go out remembering that too.