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Title: Remember Me

Date: March 29, 2018 Maundy Thursday

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Scripture: [Luke 22:1-63](#)

Text: [Luke 22:21-27, John 14:3](#)

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I am having trouble with my memory. No, you needn't worry. I'm not having that much trouble. At least I don't think I am, although I did lose my car the other day. Well, I didn't really lose it; I just parked a couple of rows over from where I normally park it. I had a moment of confusion, like I may be having now because you didn't really come tonight to hear about me losing my car. I do get distracted by wandering off from the main subject. That is nothing new. I've been doing it since I child. You can't believe the number of rabbit holes that I could chase down when I was a kid. I've always needed help staying on the subject because I'd wander off talking about me instead of staying focused. Now, what is it that we are talking about? Oh yes, remembering.

You might say I'm having senior moments. That's how we like to categorize them, isn't it? Researchers aren't too sure that there is something called a senior moment. I suspect those researchers who think there aren't senior moments likely aren't seniors. They may write different papers when they get older.

As I understand it, the trouble we have with remembering isn't an issue of storage capacity. Our brain doesn't get overloaded as our computer's hard drive does even though it sometimes feels that way. Do you ever have too much on your mind? Rather, remembering is somehow related to the way we encode and retrieve information. Now, what did I have for breakfast or where was I on 9/11? Those are called episodic and flashbulb memories and scientists say that they decline the most. They say that semantic memory (that would be words and concepts) and procedural memory (the way you do something over and over again—you know, you never forget how to ride a bicycle), semantic and procedural memory decline the least.¹ They would say, "Words and rituals stay with you longest."

I wonder if Jesus understood this or did he just stumble onto to it? Words and rituals stay with you longest. "On the night which Jesus was betrayed...." You remember those words, don't you? Of course, you do. It is why you are here and it reminds you of our most sacred ritual. But there is more to remember than just that, which is why Jesus took words and rituals

to give us his words and ritual. Whether he understood it or not, it is the science of memory. Look and you'll see.

You've already heard that as the day begins, Jesus tells Peter and John to prepare the Passover Meal and they respond by asking "Where?" Jesus gives them instructions. Follow the guy with a water jar and he'll show you the room. "So they went and found everything as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal." (Luke 12:13) Sounds simple; it was not.

How did they remember what to do? Well, they weren't old like some around here who loses his car and has senior moments. But that's not a very satisfactory answer. The better answer is they knew the ritual; they had practiced it over and over again, every year for 25 or 30 years. Remember, words and rituals stay with you longest. They grew up knowing what it looked like, what it smelled like and what you said when you had this meal. You didn't deviate and have, for instance, ham instead of lamb.

We did that once, when my mother was still alive, although we did just the opposite. We had lamb instead of ham for Easter brunch. I can't tell you the trouble I got in even though I told her that lamb was more theological. It didn't matter. It never happened again. You don't mess with the ritual of Easter brunch any more than you mess with the ritual of Passover.

They had to have lamb, but not just any lamb. It was a year old lamb, without blemish. They would take it to the Temple to be slaughtered. The blood was captured in a bowl and poured onto the Altar. They'd wipe the mantle of the door, a ritual that they'd done for years dating back to the liberation of Israel from Egypt. Then, they'd find one of the temporary ovens set up throughout Jerusalem to roast their lambs. There were hundreds of them because of the many pilgrims. All over Jerusalem, people were doing just what Peter and John were doing. Everyone knew the ritual because words and rituals stay with you the longest. That's what the experts tell us.

They prepared the meal to go with the lamb: bitter herbs, unleavened bread and four cups of wine. I know, I know you think there is only one but there are four. And not just four cups to be shared. Four cups for everyone. That's a lot of cups on the table and lot of wine and with that much wine, you might have trouble remembering. Everybody knows that having too much wine and causes you not to remember. Don't worry. They were just 3-ounce glasses and often time, the wine was cut with water.²

The meal began when the father or in this case, Jesus lifted the cup of sanctification and prayed the Kiddush, a traditional blessing. Everybody in

the place knew the words and knew the ritual. How? How do you know the Lord's Prayer that we just deconstructed? The Kiddush was prayed not just before the Passover but was recited on Sabbath and other holy days.

Following the Kiddush, there was the "urchatz" which was a ritualistic washing of hands before touching the food. Some think this was the moment that Jesus altered the ritual. Jesus rose from the table and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. Jesus broke the ritual or perhaps it might be better to suggest that he expanded the ritual.

Now that the feet have been washed, it was time for the meal. Someone would ask, "Why is this night special above all others?" and the eldest or head, presumably Jesus began reciting the story of the Exodus while leading them in ritualistically eating foods from the Seder plate. They used a ritual to remember the words. And on the table, four cups of wine to remember four promises of God. You remembered these promises by dipping bread in the cups. Someone knew the neuroscience of remembering. Words and rituals stay with you longest.³

After they had the Passover meal and after they had the ritual of remembering, two things happen. As Jesus takes the unleavened bread and the cup he says he won't eat or drink until he comes again. Then offers new words and a new ritual. He says, this is my body broken, and my blood poured out for you, a new covenant. And then, remember me. A new ritual and new words. Remember me.

Everything scripture tells us is the disciples didn't have a clue about what Jesus was saying to them. Best case, they thought he was expanding the Passover words and ritual like he'd done washing their feet. Why would they need to remember Jesus? They didn't know that in less than 24 hours he'd be dead. They couldn't possibly understand what he was saying when he said, "Remember me."

We know this because of what follows. Jesus says, "One of you will betray me" and they began talking among themselves about who it might be. They didn't ask what the betrayal was going to be. They just start talking about who might do the dirty deed and then, amazingly, Luke says they pull a Randy. They lose themselves in the parking lot, go down a rabbit hole and start talking about themselves, about who was greatest. Jesus has just said, "Remember me" and they wander off to who is most important. As an expert in this kind of wandering off to talk about me, I can spot it. Can you? You know those times when you get so caught up in yourself that you lose focus on what is really going on.

Jesus brings them back to the subject at hand which is him, not them. What are we talking about here? Who is greatest? I'll tell you who is greatest. Who is greater, the ones who are at the table or the one who serves? But I am among you as one who serves. Remember? Remember me.

Don't look at your red letter edition. He doesn't say it again but isn't that what he is saying? "I am among you as one who serves" sounds an awful lot like remember me. As the rest of the evening unfolds, remember me starts getting underscored like a college textbook before a final exam. From the inability to stay awake in the Garden, to his arrest and their collective betrayal, remember me echoes through the night as loudly as the cock crowing.

The next day, as Jesus and Barabbas stand before the same crowd that honored him with Hosannas, remember me hangs like a question. They don't and so Jesus hangs, on a cross and because Pilate was worried we wouldn't remember, he puts Jesus' name above his head. He understood people have trouble with their memory

We do, even though we protest. I'm not having that much trouble. You needn't worry. But I do. I don't intend to serve ham here instead of lamb. I don't want to mess with your words and ritual. But I think we come to this evening just like those disciples who gathered around the table with Jesus. We know the words and ritual, but somehow, we get distracted from what they really mean. We have memory problems and there are a lot of reasons for it. Because I'm an expert at this, I think I know what they are.

One is this. We come to this table to focus on the ritual and words of remember me and we get distracted by the pronoun, forgetting that the "me" is Jesus and not me. We make the "me" about us. We wander down the rabbit hole of our own lives, chase down our own needs and hopes for what Jesus can do for us is doing for me. Like grade schoolers, we raise wave our hands and say, Jesus, me, me, me. It ends up making this service about the one who is served instead of the One who served. When that happens, we have memory problems. That's one of the reasons.

Another might be that we simply have too much on our minds. That can happen and the truth is, we all have too much on our minds. Too many problems, challenges, concerns, about our personal lives, our family, our friends, our community, our country, our world. You can feel overloaded and when you are, it's like a computer that just doesn't work right. There is so much there that it is hard to access the information about "remember me" and we end up having memory problems. That's another reason.

There might be a third and maybe it is the biggest problem. You've had too much to drink, too much wine. Everyone knows when you have too much wine, you have problems remembering. It could be that. Some of us have gone to this table a lot of times, have had a lot of bread and wine, heard the words and experienced the ritual so many times that we end up having memory problems. That's a reason.

Whatever the reasons, we come on Maundy Thursday to get it right, to embrace what the experts of about memory tell us and what I think Jesus knew. Words and rituals last the longest which is why he took bread and wine, broke it, blessed it and said, "Remember me." Remember me until I come again. I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

The words and ritual of remember me do not just remind us of his body broken and his blood shed, even though they do. The words and ritual of remember me don't just remind us of his atoning sacrifice on a cross, even though they do. The words and ritual of remember me remind us of until I come again. Remember me until I come and I will come for you. Jesus knew words and ritual last the longest.

In a very surprising and unintentional way, this is the truth of the Academy Award-winning song presented just a few weeks ago. It was from the animated movie CoCo and the title is the same words that Jesus said, "Remember me." Even if you haven't seen the movie, which is a wonderful story about the Day of the Dead, you likely have heard its song. Other than the reference to sad guitar, I think the lyrics fit the one who first said remember me.

Remember me
Though I have to say goodbye
Remember me
Don't let it make you cry
Forever if I'm far away
I hold you in my heart
I sing a secret song to you
Each night we are apart
Remember me
Though I have to travel far
Remember me
Each time you hear a sad guitar
Know that I'm with you
The only way that I can be
Until you're in my arms again
Remember me

We are here to remember that every night we are apart, Jesus holds us in his heart. Remember that he is with us even when we are apart. Even though he is far away, one day, he'll take us in his arms, he promised. All of that from remember me. That shouldn't surprise us because, words and rituals stay with us longest and in this case, these words and rituals last into eternity.

¹Memory Changes in Older Adults, "Senior moments" less inevitable than once thought."

<http://www.apa.org/research/action/memory-changes.aspx>. Retrieved 3/2/2018.

² Routledge R. Passover and Last Supper. *Tyndale Bulletin* [serial online]. 2002 2002;53(2):203-221. Available from: ATLASerials, Religion Collection, Ipswich, MA. Accessed March 28, 2018.

³ http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1998/jewish/The-Seder-Plate.htm