

May 20, 2010 – Opening Worship
EPA Annual Conference
Lancaster Convention Center
I Corinthians 11: 23-34

“Remember” by Bishop Peggy A. Johnson

We all love a mystery. The word itself conjures up mystery novels, mysteries of science, unsolved crimes, or unusual phenomena in nature. How amazing that the human body and all of its functions are programmed in our DNA and scientists are now figuring out which gene does what so that in the future congenital diseases can be headed off before they occur or even remedied once they occur.

How amazing the mystery of how penguins live in sub-zero temperatures in terrible blizzards and these penguins can always find their mate in a crowd of thousands of penguins in a blizzard. I can't find my husband in the food store.

How amazing the mystery of outer space ...could there be other “earths” out there with humans just like us in other galaxies and someday we may get to meet them. That will make Columbus discovering America look like stroll around the block.

Indeed the mysteries of life in many ways are hidden from us. When it comes to our faith it too is full of mystery. How could God come to earth as a person, fully God and fully human? How could God the creator of life, die for the creature. How did the death of Christ on the cross account for the sins of the world for all time...past and present.

Charles Wesley, in his famous hymn “And Can it be” sums it up well: “Tis mystery all, the immortal dies...who can explore his strange design?”

Yet in all of its mystery ...God is more about clarity and proclamation of truth than hidden, impossible realities.

Today we are here to begin our annual conference with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is Holy Mystery in which we experience the reality and grace of Christ's presence with us in this meal. We are here to consider the words of Paul from I Corinthians, a letter written to a new church that was more about chaos than order. Paul was writing to them to set down some rules and explain the meaning of the mystery of the heavenly feast. This is a letter of practical considerations....words for us still today as well as for the early believers.

Give Thanks

Jesus gave thanks before he offered up the bread and the cup. The Greek word for "thanks" is "Eucharist" and in many traditions the Lord's Supper is called the "Eucharist" to remind us of the joyful thanksgiving event we are experiencing.

We are thanking God for the life of Jesus...the body and blood...just as Jesus thanked God for the piece of bread and the cup of wine...we are giving thanks for the eternal bread and wine...Jesus. Jesus died in our place that we can be in relationship with God.

We are thanking God for Jesus' death on the cross that was love with no holding back. Come to this table today with thankfulness.

The word "thank" comes from the root same root word as "think" Truly when we think we thank. Often we rush through life, rush through communion, thinking about what we are going to do the rest of the day or what someone is wearing and not really thinking about the thanking...

Thank God for this personal gift of life sacrificed for you.

Remember

Jesus said to do this sacrament in remembrance of him. Re-member means to re-incarnate...to give something a body. Jesus' Body is all the members of the church...that is us....in all of our diversity and gifts.

When we re-member Jesus we think about all of the parts of the body. All the world is called into union with Christ through this act of death.

Yet all of the parts of the body are not equally welcome. Some parts are not welcome at all. We struggle with our re-remembering because to remember means to accept as part of us, all of us. Jesus so wanted unity in the body. His last prayer for us was this: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." (John 17:20-21)

As we remember – think about who is not a member here...who you are uncomfortable being around? Think about how you can get over that and include everyone in the circle of Christ's body.

I used to work at an all Deaf church and the hardest people for the deaf to accept were the people with HIV/AIDS. Misunderstandings about the spread of the disease, just that sense of class-ism that separated the more proper, affluent members from the IV drug users with HIV caused conflict and dis-memberment. One man called for the end of the passing of the peace and for communion to no longer be done by intinction...so great was the separation in that body. I am happy to say that with teaching, prayer, Bible study and slow, but deliberate work the two sides came together in peace....and when that happenedwe remembered Jesus at the communion table.

Proclaim the Death of Christ until he comes again.

Paul is calling the Corinthians to witness to people about Jesus. Tell people about this Jesus who died and rose again for all people and invite this witness to become a time of commitment.

I hear a lot of statements about the decline of the church and calls for change so that we can reverse our membership loss. I hear a good bit of blame dished out in these discussions. I believe that everyone who stands up and gives a speech about this needs to share with me the names of the 10 people they shared Christ

with this week. If they can't then they can't speak about this until they do.

There is a lay person in our conference who is constantly witnessing about Jesus to people and bringing folks into his church right and left. He just sent me an email about when he was in the hospital. The man in the bed next to him was very fearful of his surgery and this layman prayed with him and witnessed about how God had helped him through and the man became a Christian.

Proclaim the Death of Christ until he comes again....if we get a big increase...wonderful!! If we don't...perhaps we are sowing seeds for a future harvest that we may not be privileged to see. God wants your faithful witness and it may or may not come with a large increase in your church attendance but do it anyway.

My husband is always reading about martyrs...one martyr went to China to preach the gospel and he had a Chinese Bible. He was arrested and later killed for being a Christian and the prison guard got to keep the man's Bible. He brought it home and papered his bathroom wall with the paper of the Bible. Years later...someone was in the bathroom, read the Words of life on the wall and became a Christian. You never know how God is going to use your witness. It may not be seen until much later....but do it anyway. Who can you witness to? Today? Tomorrow at work? In your homes, in this church?

Share your material blessings with one another

In this passage are some sharp words about sharing. Seems there was a food problem in the Corinthian church...some were eating all the food and others got nothing. This passage is very harsh....Paul says people are being punished by God with death and illness because of their lack of sharing.

I don't think it stops with manners at a potluck...this planet of ours has mostly poor people and this tiny group of about 5% of the world...Americans...using up 90% of the world's resources and not sharing and actually trying hard to make sure they don't get anything. There is a great debate in this country over accessible

Health Care, Immigration Reform, Clean Water, Green house gases.....all of this has something to do with sharing....being fair.... It starts with you and me.....

Jesus said if you have two coats ...give away one...if you have food, share it...if you have health care ...help someone who can't get their prescriptions filled because their check ran out on the 20th of the month.....whatever you have...share it....that is why God gave it to you in the first place.

If we don't we are just hurting ourselves....our planet is like a boat and if there is a hole on one side of the boat the whole boat goes down.....we are all inter-connected and as we work for the welfare of all...then there will be peace and enough for everyone....

Examine yourself

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to come to the Lord's table with a proper self examination of sin. That is something that the early class meetings of Methodists did every week. They would confess their sins to one another and hold one another accountable. That kind of thing is almost unheard of....imagine telling someone you have a problem with internet pornography, or an eating addiction, or workaholic tendencies, or that you have a grudge against a family member that you can't let go of. Just imagine being that open! They were and the church soared in holiness and lives were changed by the power of God in accountable community.

Examine yourself today before you take the sacrament: who do you need to forgive? Who has something against you where you sinned? What practices in your life are displeasing to the Lord?

Remember Christ's prayer: forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors... we take the bread and the cup in an unworthy way if we are not in charity and peace with our sisters and brothers.

John Wesley worked for a rich man named Oglethorpe. His servant broke a large box of wine bottles and the servant was severely punished for the blunder. Wesley said to

Oglethorpe...."sir, forgive"...Oglethorpe said "I never
forgive"...Wesley said "I hope you never sin."
God forgives as we forgive. Forgive and come to the table

What a wondrous mystery.....the Lord of life dying for us....but more than
mystery is the neon sign clarity of God's love for you and me....remember Jesus
today....Remember the Body.