

“Remember”
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October 25, 2020
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Rehoboth Beach, Delaware

A few weekends back, right before I began my time at the church, Kevin, Micah, and I headed out from our rental condo in Lewes to hit up the Georgetown-Lewes trail. It was a glorious Saturday morning—you know what I’m talking about, one of those absolutely perfect early Fall days when nature alone can make you feel as if all is right in the world. We headed out for a little family jog. Micah had just started with the Seahorse Striders Cross Country Team and Coach B had instructed the parents to get their runner out for a 20 minute run on Saturday and Sunday. Kevin and I were eager to comply as for many years we have had to tag team our own workout runs. What a refreshing change to be able to all go for a jog as a family—all of us getting a little dose of healthy exercise on the weekend in such a timely and efficient manner. We didn’t make it too far, however, before we felt the glorious day beckoning us to pause our little run so we could stop in at Old World Bakery.

Let’s face it: the wonderful smell of freshly baked bread and pastries alone, which wafts out of the building and carries all the way over to unsuspecting trail users, is enough to sideline even the most carb avoidant among us. We figured it was worth a stop and that we could always resume our jog after getting a little treat. Needless to say, the breakfast treats we indulged in were simply divine. But it was the healthy little rosemary bush, full of bright green, thick needles, growing outside the bakery’s front door that caught my eye as we stood, for quite some time, with our masks on and waited in line as the small number of folks who could enter the bakery at one time was being strictly and appropriately enforced. Micah loves herbs and so he saw the bush right away and got a little piece to smell and eat. We wondered together whether the bakery used that very rosemary in making its focaccia or other savory breads.

Did you know that Rosemary is used to remember? In English folklore, rosemary slipped into the pockets of errant lovers, was said to remind them of their vows. Shakespeare’s Ophelia said rosemary is for remembrance. Scientists even say the plant is linked to a better memory, and studies have shown that a room infused with rosemary actually boosts intelligence scores. So, if we were worshipping together in the sanctuary today, I would have plugged in my infusers and filled the space with the smell of the essence of rosemary. The reason is because today we are embarking on a four-week Stewardship series entitled: Our Money Story. We begin our series by looking back and **remembering** what our spoken and unspoken money stories have been and how these stories have impacted our practice of stewardship.

Now, let’s be clear: to speak about money is often to invite tension into the room with us. We so quickly want to avoid it or to speak indirectly about money, to gingerly skirt around exactly what we are talking about. So right now, I’m going to invite you to take a few deep breaths and intentionally work on relaxing your body and your mind. We are going to be

intentionally direct in our Stewardship series. Money and possessions are one of the most common topics in scripture, and Jesus talked about money more than faith and prayer. That should tell us something, shouldn't it? More than anything, I want to encourage you to consider both your personal money story and our church's money story as a deeply spiritual stories. We are invited to remember our money stories and God's money story, as found in scripture, so that we can begin to write money stories that honor God and deepen our discipleship.

In our Exodus passage, we remember that the Israelites complained in the wilderness but were met with manna from God. Essentially, in the midst of their wilderness trials, they had to be told and retold of God's enduring love and faithfulness for them. They were fearful and anxious—God had freed them from enslavement in Egypt but they still doubted God's plan for their flourishing as they wandered in the wilderness. Yet God graciously rains down bread from heaven for them and provides quails for their evening meal. God provides very tangibly just what they needed as they journeyed through a time of great uncertainty.

Again and again, the story of the Israelite wilderness wandering reminds us that God hears our complaints and anxieties and responds with more than enough provisions so that each of us can have just what we need. God provides ever so graciously! Neither Israel nor we have been abandoned by God. But God also desires to shape us as a different kind of people, a different kind of community. For you see, in the ritual practice given to Israel to daily gather the food that falls from the sky, there is a new opportunity to learn, with their very bodies, not only to trust in God but also to share their basic human resources equitably.

Friends, as we remember this important story of our ancestors in the faith, can we allow it to infuse our thinking about God's money story and our own? The story reminds us that God is deeply responsive to our financial situations. God acts decisively to provide so that we have what we need. In this congregation I have heard stories of the "In God We Trust" budget line and the way that in the midst of budget shortfalls, money was given, often in expected ways, by unexpected givers, to cover the needs of this church's budget.

But let us also remember that this story shows us how God wants to shape us, through daily reliance on God ("give us this day our daily bread") to trust that God's got us and thus to share our own resources equitably. When this church entered, some years ago, into it Capital Campaign project for the elevator which then expanded into the Narthex add-on, you embodied your trust in God in faithful and generous giving that made raising ½ million dollars seem easy. You learned something in your bodies as a faith community about trust in God. I trust that you have also learned something in your bodies about sharing your financial resources this summer so that Delawareans might have their medical debt relieved. And don't you know that those Delawareans, who were being crushed by debts they could never repay, felt some healing in their bodies by this act of economic justice you participated in! Thanks be to God!

So, friends, if you had a sprig of rosemary under your nose right now, helping to promote your memories and remembering, what would you today give testimony to in your life of God's provisions for your own financial needs? What do you need to remember in your

own body about the way God has called us to be a community that shares equitably so that everyone has what they need? Could you, this week, reach out to someone in this church or a friend or family member and share the memories stored in your body?

In today's gospel story, we see how Jesus is offering provisions, from his own body, to fulfill God's way, or God's kingdom. His is an offering that is deeply transformational not transactional like the way our world works. No, instead, his way of offering of himself is based on a radically alternative economy. In contrast to Jesus are the religious leaders, who are fearful of the people and use the persuasive power of their money to help assuage their fears by plotting to kill Jesus. Jesus' way, his practice, is so very different, and it sets him apart from the religious leaders. He takes a meal, something necessary for living, the very fuel for our bodies, and he divides it up so that there is enough for everyone at the table, even Judas. Jesus' table is one that is open to all—none are excluded at Jesus' table, even Judas, his betrayer, has a rightful spot. Jesus gives the bread and cup to each and every disciple. There is enough for each of them so that no one has to live in fear or misuse their power to get what they need. You see, in this action of breaking and dividing the bread among them, Jesus is asking his disciples to remember, until he comes again, that God's way happens, on earth as it is in heaven, when we commit to new economic practices.

What does this mean? Well, by and large, many in our community have power and privileges that many others in our surrounding community do not have. Many of us have, at least to some degree, financial freedom and security. We have our basic needs met and then some. Now, I don't think we always think of the Last Supper as showing us a different economic pattern. But if we stop and think about it in this way, we can see Jesus calling us, as his disciples, to remember that following after him involves a complete reorientation of how we use our economic privileges, our financial security, and our power. Rather than denying or hiding ourselves from our own power and potential, Jesus invites us to live into God's new economic patterns and practices. Jesus' table practices show us the way.

What might this look like in our practices? What might it mean for us to split up and divide the resources and privileges we have so that others at the table can have a share in them, too? Each time we come to Jesus' table, we are invited to remember this new way of being in relationship with others in the world. We are invited to remember that in Jesus' new economy, resources are divided up and given freely to all. Rather than using our money and resources to assuage the fears we carry with us, especially as we live in this broken and chaotic time, can we use our money in a way that boldly participates in Jesus' new economy?

This is a big challenge. It is a remembering for the sake of God's liberation and transformation of us all—that God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. Like we have seen today with the religious leaders and with Judas, a scarcity mindset, fear, and conflict will always threaten to dismember our participation in God's money story. So let us today recommit to remembering that God has a greater money story to tell us—a story that re-members us to God and makes the world whole. May it be so! Amen!