Sunday, August 16, 1992
WAYS OF REMEMBERING
I Corinthians 11:23-26; Mark 14:22-26

We human beings are distinguished from other living creatures by one fact we seldom consider: we are the only creatures who build tombs and erect monuments.

To put it another way, only we human beings seem to have the desire or instinct to want to preserve the memory of ourselves. As far back as we can trace human life, there are markers for graves seeking to keep alive a memory. The remains of tombs are more ancient than the remains of dwelling places for people who were alive. Cities of the dead in archaeology antedate cities for the living. We human beings will do almost anything to keep from being forgotten.

But there's more to memory than simply being remembered. The remembering of things past can be a guide and a help in the present and the future. That's why the study of history is so important. The fact that we remember is also a way of saying that the past, the present, and the future are inextricably linked together. Especially, therefore, in our Christian faith is remembering important.

The Bible makes abundant use of the faculty of memory. The Bible itself is memory written down. Again and again in the Old Testament, God says to the people of Israel, "Remember!" "Remember you were slaves in Egypt. Remember that God led you out of slavery. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Remember all of God's commandments. Remember your ancestors in the faith."
God knows, and we know, that what we choose to remember to a large extent determines what we are and what we do. When my brother and sister and I get together and remember our childhood, it's amazing what different things we have chosen to remember. Some of us remember our dad and mom being one way, and others remember them as being something else. Consider too that a remembered hatred can cause us to continue to hate and block us from loving. A remembered love can cause us to continue to love.

All holidays are ways of remembering. They recall events or individuals of the past. Birthdays, anniversaries, July 4th, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Veteran's Day, Washington's birthday, Easter — all are occasions to help us remember.

Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is a meal of memory. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." And he took bread and broke it and gave it to them, and he took wine and poured it out and said, "Take and drink in remembrance of me."

More specifically, what are some of the things that Holy Communion helps us to remember about God as revealed in Jesus Christ?

First of all, Holy Communion reminds us in our eating and drinking that just as God was in Christ, so God through Christ is also in us. In our eating and drinking, we are taking Christ into us.

Now you may say—"But Christ lives in and among us whether or not we ever take Holy Communion." Of course, that's true — Holy Communion is simply a way of remembering and reinforcing. You can say you love someone, but if you never express that love in a tangible

way — that love has a way of dying. The handshake, the embrace, the kiss, the words, the touch of the hand, the small gift, all are tangible expressions of our feeling and emotions, and they are more than that — they can help the love to grow stronger.

I once knew a home where the father's intensely reserved nature would not abide any expression of love. He neither kissed nor embraced his children nor allowed them to kiss or embrace him. He was a good father, but somehow this firm prohibition became a barrier that grew and grew until at last father and children seemed to be living on opposite sides of a wall. It was a symbol and action neglected. A small thing to some, perhaps, but it helped freeze the expanding love of those children and of the father. The father would've given a great deal to break the barrier down but somehow could not. Symbols and actions neglected may weaken the emotion and feeling they were intended to express.

Now of course, symbols and actions can become abused, or they can become empty forms. Nevertheless, we are not faced with the question of symbols or no symbols, for life is constantly presenting them to us. Properly and reverently used, the symbol can be a way of remembering and strengthening.

Second, Holy Communion reminds us not only of our close relationship with God through Christ but also of our close relationship, our connectedness with each other and with all of creation.

Someone put it this way: "When we take a piece of bread, we take something in which the sun, moon, and stars have all shared their life. We take with the piece of bread the mystery of rain falling on the earth; the mystery of its darkness, of grain growing. That strange mystery of how human beings discovered that these grains of wheat could be beaten into flour and people could learn how to bake bread over fire. We take in this bread all the cosmos, everything of nature — all the mysteries of human existence."

"The bread feeds our bodies, and out of our bodies, our thoughts come into the brain. And from the brain and the body come all those spiritual affections by which we characterize our lives and freedom. In short, when we break bread, we break open all things, ourselves and the world included, and we move into the vast solemn moment when we say there is meaning in death and life — there is meaning in this vast contradictory mixture of things."

Furthermore, to eat together is to meet at the level of our most basic need. To eat this particular meal together is to meet at the level of our most basic humanness, which involves our need not just for food but for each other. I need you to help fill my emptiness just as you need me to help fill yours.

Holy Communion helps us remember that we are sisters and brothers with God as our creator, and it reminds us especially that Christ died for all people everywhere.

The next time you walk down the street, take a good look at every face you pass and, in your mind, say: "Christ died for you." That woman, that man, that bum, that phony, that saint, that person I hate, that fool — Christ died for all of them.

Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, for them, and for everyone. Amen.