

Maundy Thursday A  
Peace, Seattle  
April 13, 2017  
Ex 12:1-14, 1 Cor 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35

## **RE-MEMBERING**

**What helps you to remember?** For many of us, music is a powerful mnemonic device that helps us recall the details surrounding significant events in our lives—events marked by happiness and delight and also by sorrow.

**“The history of music,” writes Jessica Wapner, “is rich with sounds spurred by suffering. During the Holocaust, songs of defiance and belief helped captive Jews confront and temporarily alleviate their misery.”**<sup>1</sup>

Recently, a long-lost recording of Holocaust survivors from just after World War 2 was recovered, and it provides “a poignant new soundtrack for understanding life in the Nazi concentration camps and Jewish ghettos.”

Here’s the backstory.

In 1946, David Boder, a psychologist with Latvian Jewish roots, traveled from America to Europe to record interviews with Holocaust survivors. His particular field of interest was trauma and he hoped to gain access to the mindset of the people who’d lived through this trying ordeal.

To do that, he began his interviews by asking his subjects to sing, and they would reply with songs that “carried them through their time behind barbed wire.”

Those recordings, made on dozens of wire spools, were preserved after Boder’s death, but because the wire recorders Boder used in the field were now obsolete, no one could play them.

Over the years that followed attempts were made to secure the equipment that could unlock the voices preserved on those recordings, but all those attempts failed.

Then, three years ago, stewards of the Cummings Center, where the recordings are kept, launched another attempt. They found a nonfunctioning wire recorder chassis on e-Bay, and using it as a foundation they built a new device using modern components.

Finally, after 70 years of silence, the songs and testimonies of survivors with specific names and experiences and voices could be heard again.

**Voices from the past invite us to re—member tonight: to link together what was broken apart.**

There is much in our service about re-mem—bering. The voices of our spiritual ancestors, originally recorded in Hebrew and Greek, recall events from 2,000 and 3,500 years ago.

And while we don’t have the live recordings of their voices, we do have their words—passed on from generation to generation until, finally, they took written form so they could continue to tell us what is essential in the sacred events they portray. In so doing, they help us RE-MEMBER.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Wapner, *Rescued from the Past, a Jewish Refugee’s Songs Haunt the Present*. *Newsweek Magazine*, Feb 5, 2017. All quotations come from this article. The full article and several recordings can be found @ <http://www.newsweek.com/unearthing-long-lost-singing-holocaust-survivor-552535> A similar article about recordings of Holocaust survivors can be found here: <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/16/406967291/1-000-songs-from-holocaust-survivors-archived>

**This re-mem-ber-ing is not simply a mental exercise of conjuring a picture back into our minds.** No. Remembering can break us open in ways we never could expect.<sup>2</sup>

The story in Exodus tells in specific detail how Passover is to be kept. And if we allow ourselves, we will be swept up in the story—to the point of smelling aroma of lamb roasting, and tasting the bitter herbs; feeling both the anxiety and the hope that mingle together on the night when God acted to liberate us from Pharaoh's bondage.

The song beneath the words is: keep on doing this and never stop, you must never forget this night, and what God has done for you.

**Both of our New Testament readings have DO THIS messages as well.**

Speaking to the Corinthian congregation which had lost its bearings in its practice of the Lord's Supper, Paul reminds them of the gravity of this meal Christ shared "on the night in which he was betrayed"—he wants to re-member them and re-connect them to the Host of the meal and the intention behind the bread and cup: that they may be one, forgiven and serving community united in love.

John's gospel puts the accent of this final meal Jesus shared on a different DO THIS. In John the focus is less on the specifics of a MEAL and more on the legacy of loving service Jesus wants to leave with his disciple community.

To show them what loving service means, Jesus strips down, wraps a towel around his waist, and sets about washing his their feet.

I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, he tells them, THAT YOU ALSO SHOULD DO AS I HAVE DONE.

In John there may be subtle overtones connecting what Jesus does to baptism and communion, but the explicit action, the charge to DO THIS is about serving one another as Jesus has served.

The Ghanaian hymn we'll sing as we commune tonight captures the essence beautifully. Pay attention to the words and rhythms when we sing it:

KNEEL AT THE FEET OF OUR FRIENDS,  
SILENTLY WASHING THEIR FEET:  
THIS IS THE WAY WE WILL LIVE WITH YOU.

**The soundtracks of our lives contain many songs.**

Some of them, like the songs of those Holocaust survivors, are haunting; others recall in us moments exuberant with joy.

Tonight, as we share these soundtracks, these touchstones, from the life of our faith family, we're invited to enter into their rhythms and meanings with a sense of conviction, gratitude, humility and joy. And so to find ourselves re-membered. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Baker-Trinity, *Free Indeed: Devotions for Lent*. (Augsburg Fortress, 2016), p. 77.