

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

“Remember Me”

Old Testament Lesson

Micah 6:1-5 (NRSV)

¹ Hear what the LORD says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the LORD has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³ “O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

Bible/Sermon Focus

The term *liturgy* means “works of the people.” When we think of liturgy we often think of worship, and the order of worship that we follow. But in our understanding of the incarnational tradition, every moment of our lives is filled with the holy, and thus our entire lives can be considered liturgical. We have moments of work, and restful sabbath. Times of prayer, and times of protest. There is a rhythm, a liturgy to our lives. And how we order our lives reflects our identity as Christians.

We have many liturgical acts of remembering in the Christian church, including communion and baptism, in which we restate the things that God has done for us and the things we promise to do for each other and for God. We have festivals and holidays recalling the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We read and re-read scripture, recalling our story. We have All Hallows Eve, All Saints Day, and All Souls Day, when we remember those who have died and are now part of the great cloud of witnesses.

Dia de los Muertos is also a liturgical act of remembering. It’s a holiday that originated in Mexico, associated with All Saints Day and All Souls Day, a cultural celebration remembering the ancestors. This celebration involves the family creating an “offrenda.” It’s like an ancestor altar. Imagine the family setting up the pictures of their deceased ancestors, and telling the next generation the story of those who came before them.

This is a liturgical act of remembering.

In "Coco," our Disney film for this week, we meet a family who has chosen not to remember part of their past and we see the damage that it does to the entire family unit. And it's not like Miguel's family is the only family with a difficult past. All families have their human issues. But the grace that God offers us should always stand as reminder that we are to embrace our past, in order to live fully and authentically in the present.

It's our job in the body of Christ to retell the story of those who came before us. We hear this in today's scripture. Through the prophet Micah we hear God asking the people to remember the Exodus. Remember that God "brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and...sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Remember that God liberates communities and will offer leadership to help in that process. Micah reminds the people that the diviner Balaam, whose every word always came true, was paid by King Balak to prophecy against Israel; upon opening his mouth the prophecy affirmed Israel instead.

God says to God's people, "Remember who I am." And in doing so we will remember who we are. We cannot run from our past.

It is in our liturgical acts of remembering that God's redeeming grace takes place. The Holy Ghost haunts her way into the darkest corners of our past and illuminates those places. And in that act, begins to redeem the parts we are ashamed of, the parts we don't know how to carry, or that parts we want to deny. And the Spirit transforms and transfigures those wounds.

We are members of Manchester UMC, a beautiful church made up of so many different kinds of people. We have been on the right side of history at times. We have been on the wrong side of history at times. Our church was built on land that was taken from the Osage and Illini people, forced out by European settlers, then much later graciously given to us by John Ball. Between those two events, there were Methodists here when Protestantism was illegal and Methodist preachers broke the law, sneaking across the river at night to lead Methodist worship in the area. Manchester UMC sided with the south during the civil war. The Methodist Church has a difficult history of racism, including making an entirely separate jurisdiction for black churches within our own denomination. It took us twenty-five years to have a female pastor working at Manchester UMC after women were given rights to ordination.

And now, we are known for missional outreach, unmatched by most churches. We are known for excellence in our specified age-level ministers, music, and traditional worship. We are leading the way through a global pandemic by sharing creative, innovative ministry practices. We are leading the way through denominational controversy with an unwavering focus on the love of God graciously extended to all people. We are leading the way through a season of reformation in the Church of Jesus Christ, drawing from a rich and vibrant 200 years of history and following the Spirit's lead into a brilliant, exciting future.

And we are far from perfect. But ... this is us. God is not done with us. There is powerful redemption for each of us, and for us as a church, and for us as the Body of Christ. We will tell our story, and the story of God. We will remember.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Disney's "Coco" in relation to this week's sermon.
2. Which liturgical acts of remembrance in the church speak most into your faith?
3. Describe your understanding of how God's redemption works? What aspects of the Trinity arise for you in that description?
4. Imagine the past members of Manchester UMC. What would you say to them? What do you imagine them being like?
5. How is your life like liturgy?

Prayer

We bless your holy name, O God,
for all your servants who, having finished their course,
now rest from their labors.
Give us grace to follow the example
of their steadfastness and faithfulness,
to your honor and glory;
through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

(All Saints Prayer from the United Methodist Book of Worship)

The first female clergy woman to serve at Manchester UMC was Rev. Linda Strominger. She served from 1981-1984 and was an Ordained Elder and an Associate Pastor.