Remembrance Sunday 2021, 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

Remembering is a creative act. The English verb is so one dimensional. We imagine remembering to be about thinking, perhaps looking a photo, summoning an emotional response. Yes, that’s true. And those are good things to do this Remembrance Sunday. But for us Christians, remembering is a deeper reality too. Remembering is to re-member (as opposed to dismember) to make whole and present. We remember not simply in thoughts and emotions, but because we are one. Jesus calls himself the vine, we are the branches. We are not individuals, but parts of a whole, we are one.

The Jews, and Our Lord Jesus Christ among them, celebrate God’s acts of salvation (and especially at Passover) not as individuals remembering something that happened to other individuals, but as part of one people, to whom God has done and is doing. The separation of time is dwarfed and made impotent by the belonging we share in unity. As we celebrate this Holy Communion, we share in the great and final Passover of Jesus, His Last Supper and Crucifixion which the Holy Ghost makes present among us now, so Jesus did with the Apostles then. Our belonging in the Apostolic company of those events is more powerful than the separation of a couple of millennia and few thousand miles.

Remembering, for Jews and Christians is a creative act. The same is true as we remember those who have died fighting or caught up in wars, in any and every time and place, because we remember, because we belong. Do you see how much more than thoughts and emotions our remembering is?
And we have confidence to say that, not because it’s nice, but because it is a deep theological well-spring of life.

This real remembering is the natural consequence of the Jewish theology of remembrance than we Christians inherit. It is the natural outworking of being The Body of Christ. One body, made of many parts.

This understanding of remembrance – belonging and presence - is the natural result of the Holy Eucharist we share week by week as we journey through life. A radical meal of unity and belonging – creature and creator and all creatures, as one. ‘Very members’ of the ‘mystical’ body of Christ, we will pray in a few minutes.

And so we pray as members of the Church, of the Communion of Saints. And we pray that all those whom we remember today would find their home in that saintly fellowship too: in the peace and life of Heaven. That Communion of Saints of which St Paul writes at the end of today’s Epistle: that, God would make us and all for whom we pray today ‘meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.’ That inheritance which is perfect unity, perfect love, at last, life in all its fullness.

We pray that Jesus would raise us all, as he did Jairus’s daughter in today’s Gospel, take us from sleep: the sleep of this life’s sadness and tragedies (especially as we remember on this Remembrance Sunday how nasty, brutish and short life is for so many in our world), and ultimately that he would take us all by the hand from the sleep of death, and bring us to himself.

That He would ‘remember’ us in His Kingdom, as the penitent thief prayed from the cross. Not ‘think of us’, not ‘look at a photo of us’, Jesus, but re-member us, make us whole and present and alive in God forever. Remembering is a creative act.
A Christian understanding of remembrance is deep and radical. We will only ever be clutching at the hem of this kind of remembrance on this side of death. Sacraments and relationships and signs are the only tools we have to begin to discover a truth of belonging and presence that stretches beyond the veil. I’ll finish with last words of Marylebone’s own TS Eliot’s Little Gidding – the last of his Four Quartets. These words somehow manage to point towards what we’re stumbling to say with words today, and finding the words run out.

‘We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree

Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always–
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.’