

Last summer,
 the five-year-old granddaughter of one of our members
 was moving far away.
 Gaia was moving from Chesterfield to Winchester.

The very thought of being separated from her grandmother
 had Gaia in tears
 one Sunday after church.
 Gaia and her grandmother stayed sitting in the pews,
 Grandma side-hugging her through her tears.

I walked over to talk with them,
 and after agreeing that indeed, Winchester was a LONG way away,
 and that yes, visiting once a month didn't seem like enough,
 I asked Gaia if she could think of anything she could do
 when she got sad and missed her grandmother.
 What, I asked, would help remind her
 of her grandmother
 and how much Grandma loved her
 even when they were separated?

Gaia thought.
 And then with an intake of air,
 she said, "I know!
 I can . . . I can . . . I can take out teddy bear Bobo
 that she gave me, and I can hug him,
 and I can think about Grandma."
 "And I can take out my mermaid doll
 and put her in front of me
 and remember Grandma."

In her own five-year-old way,
 Gaia had identified a way to summon and feel
 all the love and presence and relationship
 she shared with her grandma:
 through the gifts that Grandma had given her.
 She had identified a way to know her grandma's love
 once Grandma

was very, very far away.

Adults, we rarely do this with teddy bears and dolls.

But we do do this:

use things as a way to remember and love someone
who is far away, or gone.

For me, it's baking cakes and cookies from my grandmother's
recipe book.

(And my grandmother lives in heaven, not in Winchester.)

I read the ingredients and directions written in her handwriting,
and as I measure and pour and mix and bake and clean,

I remember her.

I feel again the role that she played in my life,
the love we shared.

Baking is my way to know her love.

Perhaps you do the same,
but not with baking.

Maybe for you it's woodworking
or fishing
or quilting
or gardening.

Some tangible thing,
some series of actions taken,
that is your way to remember a beloved person.
A way to know their love.

People in the Bible did this, too.

The Apostle Paul moved frequently in his life,
and he missed many of his friends around the world.

When he wrote to his friends in Corinth, he recounted how
they, too, used food to remember and to summon
and to feel again the presence of their mutual friend, Jesus.

Paul shares with the Corinthians
the meal that he learned from with Jesus:
how Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and when he had given thanks, he broke it

and called it his body.
 And how Jesus took a cup
 and proclaimed it the new covenant in his blood.
 “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you”
 Paul says,
 sharing the gift that Jesus gave him
 as a way to know Christ’s love.
 “Do this in remembrance of me,”
 Christ instructed.
 Share this meal
 to know
 Christ’s love.

And like Gaia’s grandmother gave her more than one gift
 through which Gaia could know her love,
 Jesus gave his disciples one more way to remember his love,
 not only a meal,
 but also a bath.

A footbath, in tonight’s case.
 The Gospel-writer John
 recounts how,
 at one of the final meals eaten with his disciples,
 Jesus got up from the table,
 took off his outer robe,
 and tied a towel around himself.
 He poured water into a basin and began to wash and wipe
 the disciples’ feet.

For the Gospel-writer John,
 this is the vision of Holy Communion:
 the community circled around the basin
 forms a foundation of a service and tradition of love.
 Jesus wants his disciples to remember a love that serves:
 a love that reorders typical social roles,
 that defies the day’s popular protocols;
 a love that upends expectations of leadership and status.

Above all,
 Jesus did this act so we would remember God's love
 and remember to love one another as God has loved us:
 "I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."
 "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

... Gaia taking out her toys that are precious gifts from her grandmother;
 ... sewing or fishing or baking to remember our beloveds;
 these are mundane, material, and important ways we love one another.
 But these acts of love and remembrance have their limitations.
 They can summon occasions and memories,
 but they cannot bring Grandma to Winchester.
 They can recreate feelings and fondness,
 but they cannot restore us to the true presence of someone we have lost.
 They cannot bring back someone who has died.

That is what sets Holy Communion apart as a way to know Christ's love:
 it does restore us to Christ's presence
 it does bring him back to us.

Because tonight, celebrating Christ's last meal,
 we and all the disciples anticipate
 how Jesus is about to move a lot farther away than Winchester.
 He is about to go to the other side of the grave,
 beyond the impenetrable barrier of death.

But the meal that Christ gave us
 is Christ's way to know his love
 beyond all limitations and obstacles,
 even beyond the barrier of death.

Although foot washing and a meal of bread and wine
 are everyday, mundane actions,
 when undertaken in Christ's name,
 with the Christian community,
 they become so much more than fond memories and good feelings.

When we circle around to celebrate again Jesus' last meal,

we are remembering and re-*membering* Christ.
We are calling upon Jesus to be with us and for us and in us
in, with, and under our gifts of bread and wine,
and Christ answering that call and showing up.
Breaking the bread *does* bring Christ among us.
Sharing the cup *does* bring us to Christ's true presence again!

This remembering indeed has a restorative power.
It offers a glimpse of God's full restoration yet to come,
makes us into witnesses of that promised restoration.
It gives us a way
to know
God's infinite, extraordinary, and everlasting love,
a love stronger than the grave,
a love more powerful than death,
a love that tonight we eat and carry in our bodies
so that all the world may know
of this Great Love.

AMEN.