

How do you remember things? I'm not talking about the kind of 'knot in a handkerchief' stuff, or where you've left your glasses. This is about how you use memory, and how what you have experienced contributes to how you are now. I'm about to spend three days in a conference talking about 'story', and how our stories express and shape who we are.

If you use Facebook you'll know that there's a newish feature which shares your Facebook memories, and pops up a picture you may have posted two or five years ago. It can't go much for the than that, because it didn't exist until February 4 2004. The thing about Facebook is that it's a factual archive. If you want to prove what you were doing on a particular day you can go to the entry on your timeline and prove it. It's a bit like an appointment diary: you can show what you were doing, but it does not tell the whole story.

Memory is a lot more complex than proving what you were doing on a particular day. Memory lives with you, often conflating and mixing up events. But those memories are formative: they are part of the story which shapes your life. Every family has its anecdotes, its 'do you remember when...' stories. My mother in law, in thanking members of her family for their part in her life on a recent birthday, said things about me which are clearly part of her approach to me and which I had forgotten about completely (I am not good at DIY, evidently).

How, and what, we remember, shapes us. And that is the purpose and the function of ritual. You might have a particular way of observing a family event: the song you always sing, the order you open presents, the food you always eat. That happens with larger entities than families: nations and peoples do that kind of thing. That is what is happening when Jesus celebrates Passover with his new family.

As a Gentile I would not presume to explain the significance of Passover for a Jew. But what I observe is a ritual in which those who eat it express the fact that they are living in a story which continues. There is a past, a present and a future here. An event which actually happened is then commemorated in a ritual, an observance. The most significant rituals involve food: our bodies as well as our minds are fed. The memory of each event is attached to something to eat or drink - like we have many toasts at formal dinners or say cheers when we drink.

When people celebrated Passover they were actually there at the events which had taken place thousands of years before. That was not just then, it is now. The Jews only continued to exist because of the events of that night, and they remain a people solely because the Angel of Death passed over. They are bidden to remember never to forget: they are a people who were, and are, and will be, delivered and saved. Their identity is bound up in the way they treat that memory and are shaped by it for ever.

Our Christian story grows from this. Matthew, Mark and Luke describe Jesus inhabiting the Passover and all its memory, and creating new memories. His death, and his being raised to life, are part of the story of God's love for his people, and they go way beyond that telling, offering rescue and hope for the whole world, not for a small people out of the world. When we tell the story, as we will through Holy Week, and as we do every time the

Scriptures are read and we celebrate Holy Communion, we place ourselves in the story. This is us: our history, our present, and our future.

The pure fact of the past is not enough. It is how we treat the event, how we access our shared memory, which will define how we act now. As rescued people will we rescue others? As saved people will we save others. As forgiven people will we forgive others? As those with new brothers and sisters in God's family will we welcome others too? Our remembering who we are is our future. And it is a hope we cannot keep to ourselves.