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Re-Membering

In Tattoos on the Heart*, Father Greg Boyle, SJ, shares the story of a former gang member in Los Angeles. Jose remembers his mother telling him over and over again, "I wish you'd kill yourself; you're such a burden to me." When he was a child, she beat him to the point that he had to wear three T-shirts to school to soak up all the blood. Kids teased him: it was 100 degrees, and Jose had on three T-shirts!*

He left home as soon as he could, joining a gang in an attempt to find the family and feeling of belonging he'd never had. But like his mother's beatings, gang life marked him, too. Tattoos tagged him as being part of this family rather than that one—a family defined by common enemies. Eventually, Jose left that home as well.

Now Jose works at Homeboy Industries, the corporation Father Boyle began to stop gang violence.

Now the "wounds" the gang inflicted are gone: Jose had his tattoos removed.

Now Jose wears just one T-shirt. It says "Homeboy Industries" on the front, and on the back are the words "Nothing stops a bullet like a job."

Now Jose talks differently about the wounds his mother left: "I used to be ashamed of my wounds. I didn't want anybody to see them. Now, my wounds are my friends. I welcome my wounds. I run my fingers over my wounds. After all, how can I help the wounded, if I don't welcome my own wounds?"[1]

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Like Jose's, each body could tell a history. We too are marked women and men, worshiping in marked churches. Christians have always been marked—by persecution, by their own divisions, by the times and places in which they have lived. At the first public gatherings after persecution ended, Christian leaders showed up with the marks of torture on their bodies.

The risen Christ showed up with marks of torture on his body, too. The apostle Thomas insists on welcoming Jesus' wounds: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Christ obliges, opening his body for Thomas to touch his wounds (v. 27). Only in touching does Thomas know that the body in front of him belongs to the risen Christ.

1. Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

The church is the body of Christ in the world today, and it too bears marks of persecution and violence. Our communions, Lutheran and Catholic, are wounded by five hundred years of division. Furthermore, we live on a marked planet, wounded by violence, ethnic struggle, ecological destruction, inequality, and grinding poverty.

How do we deal with our wounds?

As a group of Lutheran and Catholic authors, we face this question, not with an answer, but with gestures of resistance: we wish to *re-member*—bone on bone and flesh on flesh—the broken body of Christ. We remember as we recall a divided history, and we remember in our longing for a common future. Just like the body of the risen Christ, the church bears wounds—a "double-woundedness" that has been officially acknowledged by both Lutheran and Catholic leaders. Yet despite our division and because of those wounds, the church is the body that people long to touch as Thomas did.

The earliest theologians spoke of the marks of the church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. We may not yet be fully one; our unholiness is often apparent in the scandals that continue to shake us; we struggle to be catholic, that is, inclusive and universal; and our theologians argue over very different understandings of apostolicity. But our two communions agree that we witness to that marked body of Christ in the world through the practices we share. In these gestures of resistance, we remember who and whose we are. And we trust that God will re-member us, bringing us together in new ways for the life of the world.

Out of these broken pieces, these wounded members, God promises a new creation.

What Do We Remember?

The year 2017 represents a remarkable anniversary—one that all Christians should know something about, because it makes us who we are today. Five hundred years earlier, on October 31, 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther (1483–1546) sent shock waves through Europe when he sent a letter called "Disputation on the Efficacy and Power of Indulgences" (better known as the Ninety-Five Theses) to the archbishop of Mainz and the bishop of Brandenburg. Luther had no intention of causing a break among Christians. Rather, he wanted an open discussion on an issue that truly troubled him—the widespread Christian practice called indulgences.

Luther believed that the pursuit of indulgences was misguided. He insisted that it distorted Christian spirituality, because it led Christians to misunderstand sin and forgiveness. An indulgence is a remission of temporal *punishment* for sins whose *guilt* has already been forgiven. An analogy might be a mother who forgives her child for breaking curfew but still insists on the punishment of grounding the child for two weeks. An indulgence would remove even that punishment. Luther felt that seeking an indulgence obscured a central aspect of the faith, making human effort to escape punishment the center, rather than God's initiative in offering forgiveness.

Efforts over the past fifty years at resolving this major theological issue have been encouraging and unifying. Lutherans and Roman Catholics have shared with each other how each side thinks about forgiveness and God's grace. The historic 1999 Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* put the matter this way: it is "by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works."[2]

So two faith communities are closer on theology today. But the division was never just theological. In fact, a whole array of political, social, and ecclesiastical interests converged on the trajectory for reform that Martin Luther inaugurated. These forces took on a robust life of their own, beyond the control of even the most powerful princes of the time. By 1530 a break seemed final, despite the best intentions for unity by Lutheran reformers and the pope's and emperor's theologians. (Luther's ruler, Emperor Charles V, had sided with the papacy.) The 1530 *Augsburg Confession* outlined the Lutheran version of the faith. It was refuted by the Roman Catholic *Confutation*. Both sides agreed on core doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, and baptism. But Lutheran teachings on the church and sacraments could not be reconciled with the Roman Catholic ones.

In a climate that emphasized force and ultimatum, meager efforts at dialogue failed. Finally, by 1545, when the reform

2. Lutheran World Federation and Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), par. 15.

Council of Trent was convoked, the split was real and irreversible. Catholics might say that the Protestant Reformation had gone too far by then to turn back. Lutherans might say that the response from Rome had been so inadequate for so long that they needed to go their own way.

As the two church bodies went their separate ways, each remembered what had happened differently. Facts are facts, but they can be strung together into very different stories. In the hundred-year anniversaries that followed 1517, Protestants used this anniversary to promote their differences with Catholics. In 1617, they used the commemoration to stabilize and revitalize a common Protestant identity for Lutherans and Reformed (Calvinist) Christians, defined by their shared differences from Catholicism. In 1717, Protestants minted coins depicting the posting of the theses on the Wittenberg castle church door. The 1817 anniversary came close on the heels of a Prussian-led defeat of Napoleon, and Prussia used the occasion to lay a foundation stone for a monument in Wittenberg's plaza. Luther was made an emblem for Prussian unity and superiority. In 1917, German leaders rallied their people by portraying Luther as a national hero amidst the terrible losses of World War I. But in 2017, Protestants and Catholics have an opportunity to commemorate the events of 1517 differently.

Lutherans and Catholics have engaged in church-sponsored dialogues for fifty years. Meanwhile, their officials have promoted common prayer, joint Scripture study, cooperative efforts in social action, and other shared activities.

As a result, they now have a real opportunity to emphasize together their unity for the good of all and for the whole world. The turning point came at Vatican II, the gathering of the world's Catholic bishops that happened between 1962 and 1965. There an overwhelming number of bishops voted, in the presence of Lutheran and other Protestant observers, to base future ecumenical engagement on the recognition that these other Christians take Scripture and creedal dogma as normative. Their churches administer the sacramental means of saving grace. The time was ripe for a sincere dialogue in truth and charity. After numerous agreed statements and a growing consensus on several essential aspects of faith, the singular achievement of a signed agreement on the doctrine of justification by faith came in 1999. The dialogue continued into the new millennium, and in 2013, the Commission on Unity offered a lengthy report preparing for the 2017 commemoration on the theme of "From Conflict to Communion."

Above all, the report insists, in whatever they undertake together, Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the greater unity they share and not from the remaining (but often more noticeable) differences that divide them. Emphasizing their greater unity strengthens the joy flowing from what they hold in common. That report also insists that Lutherans and Catholics should surrender to the ongoing transformation of their encounters by their mutual witness. In such a way, Catholics and Lutherans will renew their commitments to praying and undertaking efforts for visible

unity and thereby rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives right now.

Lutherans and Catholics can strengthen their common witness to the mercy of God in proclamation of the good news and in service to the world. They might also imagine how what they do together in 2017 will be remembered in 2117.

Lutherans and Catholics agree that unity is God's gift to the church and not the result of any human effort. Still, they feel they must do all they can to remain in unity so they can serve the world together. The Gospel of John records this prayer of Jesus for his followers given before his passion and death: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20–21). The course of the growing consensus over the past fifty years to fulfill the prayer of Jesus did not follow any predicted path. Catholics and Lutherans were surprised that on justification by faith and a subsequent agreement on what makes the church apostolic, they could arrive at a sufficient but "differentiated" consensus. On the fundamental doctrines that make them Christians, Lutherans and Catholics could agree. Real and essential differences remain but do not obstruct agreement on the fundamentals of faith.

Lutherans and Catholics agree that the church is the body of Christ, that there is only one Christ, that there is only one body, and that through baptism, all become members

of this body. In the words of the Commission on Unity, "In remembering with each other the beginning of the Reformation, they are taking their baptism seriously."[3] But there is much more to this commemoration. Catholics and Lutherans agree that they are called to share the healing and reconciling presence of Christ through the proclamation of his message through word and sacrament and through service to all. To remember that imperative is to begin to welcome our wounds as Christians living in division.

How Do We Re-Member?

Sometimes individual memories come to us unbidden. But usually the task of memory is real work. Toward the end of his *Confessions*, Augustine reflects on the nature and significance of memory. He describes its "fields and spacious halls . . . where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them" by our experiences. "When I go into this storehouse," Augustine explains, "I ask that what I want should be brought forth. Some things appear immediately, but others require to be searched for longer and then dragged out" (X.viii).

This image of the "great hall of memory"—like a huge library with thousands of individual books stashed away—probably resonates with many people's experience. We try to recall the details of an event or a name that has been "misplaced" among countless other thoughts and experiences. Augustine's

3. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), par. 221.

description of memories as treasures in a field evokes Jesus' parable of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13, prompting us to contemplate how memory is significant to the task of witnessing to the peace of Christ in a broken world.

Augustine's image is appealing and evocative. But recent research on the science of memory suggests that remembering is not merely a task of retrieval; it is also a process of reconstruction. In *Pieces of Light: How the New Science of Memory Illuminates the Stories We Tell about Our Pasts,* psychologist Charles Fernyhough explains that viewing memories as physical things is misleading: "Memories are not possessions that you either have or do not have. They are mental constructions, created in the present moment, according to the demands of the present moment."[4]

For this reason, a memory is not a static thing, like an heirloom we take out of the closet on holidays. Instead, "a memory is more like a *habit*, a process of constructing something from its parts, in similar but subtly changing ways each time."[5] The fragmentary threads that our memories weave and reweave are located in our bodies and in the stories and practices that communities of people have shared over time. Often what triggers the process of recollection is a familiar smell, taste, or song, the feeling of standing in a place where we've stood before, or a friend or family member's "Remember when?"

4. Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: How the New Science of Memory Illuminates the Stories We Tell about Our Pasts* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 5.
5. Ibid., 6.

The memories elicited by these sensory triggers may be random, inconsequential, or even unwanted, but as human persons and communities, we also have more deliberate ways of remembering and ritualizing the things most important to us. We acknowledge birthdays and anniversaries with candles, cake, or flowers. We mark the birth of nations as well as the terrors that have befallen them through symbol and ceremony, with the imperative that we "never forget!" Nations build monuments, fans wear team colors, and some even mark their bodies with tattoos in an attempt to preserve a sense of identity and belonging.

In a similar way, as Christians, we remember who we are not simply through looking backward and recalling what has happened in the past, but also through continuing to share and embody the gifts and practices that have made us. Musicians and athletes practice specific movements and patterns over and over again. They do so precisely in order to shape the intuitive memory of their bodies. In much the same way, the practices that bring wholeness and unity have to be made incarnate in the body of Christ, the church.

There is, moreover, an *ethical* dimension to how we remember. We need to be attentive to the facts as we understand them, first of all. But then there is the matter of motive—do we remember truly, or do we bend our recollections to serve our own interests? And we need to remain aware of the ways we employ memory in the present to unite or divide, to bring healing, restoration, and wholeness or to dwell on the wrongs of the past.

Beyond the recollection of our history in its moments of both division and reconciliation, we, the authors of this resource, wish to remember who we are as Lutherans and Catholics through several shared and ongoing embodied, human practices. We consider here praying and breathing, eating and drinking, singing and worshiping, forgiving and reconciling, serving and seeking justice, and dying and grieving. As we look forward to the next fifty, or perhaps five hundred, years of dialogue and communion, such practices will be essential to the ongoing *re-membering* and *re-forming of the body*—not just to recall our history in a commemorative and retrospective way, but also to take the broken pieces and put them back together as a new creation. Paul writes, "For not only the creation but we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Rom. 8:23-24).

Our hope in writing this book is that attention to the embodied and communal practices we describe in the following chapters might help us—not only as Lutheran and Catholic Christians, but also as a human family—to truly re-member who and whose we are as we seek the healing of our wounded world. The chapters that follow are not intended to be an exhaustive or comprehensive treatment of the practices of Christian life, but are rather a shared meditation on the ways that we may not only welcome the wounds that mark us, but also begin to heal them.