

The gravesite and the marathon

By [Julian DeShazier](#)

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I have a friend who visits his mother's burial site each year on the anniversary of her death. When the day comes, the mood is always solemn and deeply reflective--and tremendously difficult for other people in his life. What they don't know is that this annual ritual is generative, corrective. It helps anchor my friend for the rest of the year.

I have another friend who almost never visits his parents' gravesite. Instead, he runs a marathon and raises money to fight the thing that took his mother's life. He works very, very hard, and brings in about \$10,000 each year to help others.

They're both entitled to hold memory however they wish, and they're both right. Exodus 12 describes the Passover and tells the people to keep it as a "day of remembrance," to "observe it as a perpetual ordinance." *Visit the gravesite.* In John 13, Jesus tells his disciples, just before the Passover, to wash the feet of others. *Run the marathon.*

Jesus isn't dissing the Passover here. God has done this amazing thing--rescuing the Israelites from Egypt--and now they are called to do amazing things as well, in sacred memory. You know how we have ancestors who have come and gone and, if we're honest, are really no more than names for us? Jesus is saying that's the wrong way to remember. Something has to be done to keep that memory alive, to keep what was sacred about that moment alive in our consciousness and in the collective

conscience of society.

I think this speaks to the way even the most firmly held beliefs can be forgotten in times of anxiety and unrest, even in times of plenty. Something happens, and as a natural part of the process we move on: we're supposed to. But does the past serve to haunt us or strengthen us? If the Hebrew people were so anxious to be leaders of nations, how would it help to remember their being rescued from a place of helplessness? Is this the anchored humility that the prophets will later call for as the recipe for restoration? How might the early centuries of the church have looked different if, in the midst of theological arguments and apologetics, everyone had paused and remembered their collective call to foot-washing?

Maundy Thursday is an opportunity to pause and reflect, remember and re-center. It's a chance to hear again that, ultimately, the life of Jesus was a life of service--done publicly so that we might imitate it. And that the blessing was in the activity that came with that sacred memory--not simply believing, and not simply acting, but joining the two. That's what makes memory "sacred."

We should find again in our lives the space for sacred days of remembrance. We might use this moment late in Jesus' ministry to reconnect with our own deep humility, which does not seek glory but seeks to wash the feet of others.