

"In Remembrance of Me" - World Communion

Psalms 26

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Hebrews is not necessarily a book we turn to very often, so I thought I might start with a little note about the background to whom, and even why, it was written. Hebrews was written to second generation Christians; believers who were removed from the intensity, intimacy, and passion of the early years of Christianity. These Christians had become distracted by the pressures of materialistic desires and violence. They became burned out, discouraged, and apathetic believers, showing signs of chronic spiritual fatigue, weary of serving others, and unable to gather enough energy and desire to be the disciples Christ had called them to be.

In a nut shell, the second generation Christians lost their purpose; they forgot who they were, and worse, they forgot whose they were. So, the author of Hebrews reminded them...

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels, as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet."

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Our memories are funny things aren't they? Raise your hand if you have ever forgotten something? Barrett will occasionally look at me and say, "I forgot. Ever happen to you?" It is usually related to the time of a meeting or who was going to get milk or the dry cleaning, but nevertheless, forgetfulness occurs. The poor Hebrews forgot who they were. And worse, they forgot whose they were. They became so focused on other things in life they forgot the most important thing- actually most important someone- Jesus. All of a sudden, forgetting meeting times, milk, and dry cleaning aren't so bad.

If forgetting is on one side of the memory coin, what is on the other? The opposite of forgetting is remembering. Raise your hand if there is something, or someone, you will always remember? Chances are that something, or someone, left a major imprint on your life. Hopefully, it was for the better. Is it a special event like your wedding or the birth of a child or becoming a grandparent or making a major move with family? Is it a parent, grandparent, friend, coach, teacher, stranger, or colleague? Who will you always remember? It is here, in our memory bank with remembrance, that I would like to challenge us to think today.

There is a beautifully illustrated children's book with a powerful message called "Always Remember" by Cece Meng (Jago). "Always Remember"...

In the end, on his very last day, Old Turtle swam his last swim and took his last breath. With his life complete, the gentle waves took him away. By dawn, everyone who knew Old Turtle knew he was gone.

The turtles playing in the reef remembered how he taught them to swim. Old Turtle had been a good teacher. And the turtles would always remember.

The broad-backed humpback whale remembered how Old Turtle swam alongside of her and kept her company when she became separated from her pod. Old Turtle had been a good friend. And the whales would always remember.

The sea otters remembered how Old Turtle would dive and play with them and make them laugh. Old Turtle loved to have fun. And the otters would always remember.

The dolphins remembered how Old Turtle was curious about the unknown and bravely swam far out to sea. Old Turtle explored the darkest of the waters and discovered glittery jewels to show his friends. And the dolphins would always remember.

Once, a terrible storm tossed and turned the ocean for three long days and nights. A starfish was torn from her rock and swept away. When the waves became calm again, Old Turtle looked for her and found her and carried her home. And the starfish would always remember.

When Old Turtle found a manatee tangled in a fishing net, he snipped and pulled and would not stop until the manatee was free. The manatee told the story to his children, and they told the story to their children. Old Turtle would never be forgotten.

Once upon a time, there was an Old Turtle. He was a wonderful teacher and friend. He loved to laugh and have fun. He explored the unknown and discovered great things. He showed kindness and strength. And he made his world a better place. When Old Turtle died, the ocean took him back. But what he left behind was only the beginning.

Who does this story invite us to think of? Maybe we thought of many different people as the characteristics of Old Turtle were revealed. Maybe we know of someone that fits the bill for the entire story. Maybe, for some of us at least, we immediately thought of Jesus. When I asked the question earlier “if there was something, or someone, you will always remember,” did any of us consider Jesus?

If you did. What is it about Jesus, about you, about your life that made you remember? If not, why not? Are we too far removed from the intensity, intimacy, and passion of the early years of Christianity? Is there something distracting us? Have we gotten burned out or discouraged?

Either way, the good news is that the words of Hebrews are a spark meant to recall and reignite our faith. Like they did for the early Hebrews, these words remind us of the sure and certain promise of God’s greatest gift to humanity; the amazing grace of God imprinted in us through Jesus.

At its core, this text is about praising God and lifting up Christ. In it, we hear what God wants for all humanity: glory and honor. But there is something in the way of allowing that glory and honor to be fulfilled. To be specific, it is human forgetfulness and disregard, which in turn, is causing human suffering. This is not new, for human suffering was initiated in the forgetfulness in the Garden and has continued from generation to generation. Since that first incident, God has been seeking to set things right. God’s latest act was a role model of salvation to serve as an eternal remedy for the suffering. This role model was Jesus.

It is Jesus, the exact imprint of God’s very being, who is “the pioneer of God drenched living, reflecting the glory of God in the flesh and blood experiences of earthly life.” It is Jesus, through his passion and palpability, who shows us the path toward polishing and reflecting the image of God in our own souls. Jesus is the real thing, the ultimate example, the only true revelation of God’s glory, and it is through Jesus that we learn how we are to live in a way that exemplifies God’s glory.

Authentic, passionate, palpable, loving, ultimate, and pioneer, just to name a few, are what defines Jesus. Jesus wasn’t just another human being living life a day at a time waiting to see

what might happen next. No, Jesus was a radical who did the work of God despite opposition, opinion, or popularity. Jesus was a radical who embraced the paradox of grace and truth, life and death, darkness and life, duty and delight. Jesus embodied glorification and humiliation, power and suffering, authority and servanthood, radical grace and radical obedience. Jesus was the son of God who always remembered who he was and whose he was, and it is because of that, that we should never forget him.

Perhaps the greatest thing Jesus ever did was bring God's people together. Everything he did and said was a message of unity to bring God glory and honor. The words we read a few moments ago from Hebrews 2 recite Psalm 8 and connect all people to the glory of Christ, suggesting that we too can grow toward perfection if we travel the Way of Jesus; the Way of love that gives up life to offer life to all. When we do, that is travel the way of Jesus (the way of love), it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we will experience the solidarity of the incarnate Son with his "brothers and sisters." This union of all "brothers and sisters in Christ" is the celebration of God's drawing the worshipping congregation into communion.

In celebration of this union, to keep us remembering and to keep us connected, we, as members of God's church, celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Fittingly enough, today is World Communion Sunday. Did you know that World Communion Sunday began in 1936 in the Presbyterian Church and was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches (predecessor of the NCC) in 1940? Think about what was happening in the World at that time. This celebration was started as an attempt to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity; in which everyone might receive both inspiration and information and be reminded of how important the Church of Jesus Christ is and how each congregation is interconnected. Donald Kerr, pastor of that Presbyterian Church, shares how the idea of World Communion Sunday spread from that first service to the world-wide practice of today:

"The concept spread very slowly at the start. People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Wide Communion symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Since then, the celebration has grown into an international ecumenical celebration of Christian unity. It is a time for remembering that around the globe, in different languages, different traditions and customs, and in various forms of liturgy, we are to celebrate our oneness in Christ with all our brothers and sisters around the world. Many have come to believe that the reason we continue to celebrate it today is to demonstrate the belief that the church founded on Jesus Christ peacefully shares God-given goods in a world increasingly destabilized by globalization and global market economies based on greed. Perhaps another way to look at greed is forgetfulness? We celebrate the Lord's Supper to recall, reignite, and remember.

At the table, some of Jesus' most memorable words were, "Do this in remembrance of me."

We are not called to simply celebrate the Lord's Supper when we come to this table on World Communion or the first Sunday of the month or any other special Sunday. We are called to never let our celebration at the table end. Yes, we are to break bread and pour the cup in remembrance of Jesus and in celebration of that Holy Night. But it shouldn't stop there. It better not stop there. God's grace doesn't end there. God's love doesn't end there. God's redemption and salvation don't end there.

Our purpose is to never let our representation of Jesus in and through our lives come to an end. We must never forget.

We are to trust and lean and call out in remembrance of him.

We are to direct our words and actions positively in remembrance of him.

We are to welcome one another in remembrance of him.

We are to embrace love and truth and be salty in remembrance of him.

We are to embody paradox in remembrance of him.

We are to seek peace and unity in remembrance of him.

We are to be good teachers and friends, laugh and have fun, explore the unknown and discover new things, show kindness and strength, and make this world a better place in remembrance of him.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised to always be with us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' death was not the end. It was the beginning. What Jesus left behind in the way he lived his life was the beginning of where we are to pick up. We are to always remember Jesus on the bank of the river, at the well, in the temple, kneeling at the feet, at the table, on the mountain, at the cross, at the door to the tomb, on the road...

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me... Do all this (LIVE LIFE) in remembrance of me."

Let all God's people say... Amen.

Invitation to the Table

For us here in this place, it is this table, which is Christ's, that gathers us together. At Christ's table, there is always room for one more to be called brother or sister.

We are known by the one who calls us to the table. We are called to the table by Christ, to sit with people of faith around the world, with people building relationships throughout space and time.

We are called to the table, especially this Sunday, when all Christians around the world celebrate communion. It is a very big table. We might love everyone at the table or like those celebrating during the war, we might not be altogether pleased with the people who share it with us, but in Christ, we are made brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and of one another. We are called to the table, not for each other, but for Christ who gives us life and love and joy and peace and grace.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, all those who trust and believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, come, for the bountiful feast of our Lord is ready... let us remember him...