

“Remember”

Ephesians 2:1-13 • Deuteronomy 6:1-13
First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Dr. Charles S. Blackshear • May 26, 2024

How's your memory these days? It's just a reality of life that as we get older sometimes our memory begins to slip a little, particularly our short-term memory. And yet, most of us are able to remember all sorts of things. I have memories from my childhood that are still as clear today as they were forty years ago. If you are over 30, you probably remember clearly the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. If you're over 40 you likely remember where you were when you heard about the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion. And if you're over 70 you probably still vividly remember the day President Kennedy was shot.

But if you're like me, you also forget a lot of things, too. Now why *did* I come into this room? I have learned over the years that if I want to remember things I have to write them down. I keep a to-do list of things I need to accomplish. Otherwise they just don't get done.

But it's not just things I need to do that I forget. Most of us get so caught up in the details of life – work, school, sports – that we forget the important things. We forget that our children would rather have our time than material things. We forget to say please and thank you and I love you. We forget that God loves us. As we face the difficulties of life, we forget that God is in control, and that he has a plan for our lives.

We forget that in Christ we have been redeemed. We have been forgiven of all the things we have done wrong and will do wrong. We fall into the trap of thinking that our money and our possessions are ours because we earned them. We forget that everything we have comes from God, that he has provided them for us to use for his glory. Why is it that we forget so much? Why is it that I can remember things that have no eternal value, like the clothes I wore for my seventh-grade history project – brown corduroy pants with a brown and orange striped shirt. It was the 70s. Don't judge me. Anyway, why can I remember that clearly, but I forget what really matters? Why do I remember the

way someone hurt me over 30 years ago, but I forget the love Jesus has for me today?

Amidst all of our forgetfulness, God says, “remember.” In fact, his call for us to remember is one of the major themes in the Bible. The word remember is used 234 times in Scripture. Many of the Psalms, in particular, remind us of God's deliverance of his people out of bondage in Egypt. The Old Testament prophets often warned about the consequences of forgetting what God had done for his people and then when they had indeed forgotten and God allowed them to be carried away into exile, other prophets called for the Israelites to once again remember the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 6, the Israelites are nearing the Promised Land. They have wandered in the desert for 40 years. In chapter 5 Moses has given the people the Ten Commandments and told them, “You shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

And then we come to today's passage: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” This passage is known to Jewish people as the “Shema,” which in Hebrew means “hear.” This is the John 3:16 of the Jewish faith. Devout Jews to this day recite this verse daily.

Love God with all your heart and soul and strength. You will remember that when one of the teachers of the law asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest he quoted the Shema. Here we find a summary of what God expects from us. He says, “OK, I've freed you from slavery in Egypt and chosen you to be my people. Now here is all I expect in return.” We are expected to love him with our whole heart, which in ancient thinking is not so much the place of feelings and emotions but rather it refers to the intellect. The heart is the source of

our will and intentions. The heart is where you make moral choices, where your character is formed.

We're also to love God with all our soul. The word soul really doesn't capture what this verse is saying. The idea in the Hebrew is "life." It refers to your inner self. You are to love God with your entire being – your desires and emotions, your body, mind and spirit.

And we're to love God with all our strength. Again, "strength" is not an accurate translation. The word actually means "very much. Literally, you are to love God with your "very-muchness." In other words, this passage calls us to love him with everything we've got and then much more.

So how do we do that? How do we go about loving God this way? By remembering! "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." You shall tie a string around your finger and you shall write Post-It notes and stick them on your fridge. You shall email these words to your friends and family and use them as your Facebook status. In other words, remember!

When Scripture calls us to remember, the idea is more than simply recalling some information or a past event. Remembering, in the Bible, is intended to shape the identity of the people and to determine their conduct. A good example of this is the Passover feast. The purpose of the Passover is to remember their deliverance from Egypt. Of course, within 40 years the entire generation of people who had crossed through the Red Sea was gone. But the goal of the celebration and the remembering is the formation of future generations of the faithful. They are called to claim the identity shaped by the God of the exodus and Sinai.

In a sense that's what we do at Christmas and Easter. We "remember" what Christ did for us in order to teach and shape our children. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we recite Paul's words that "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." We remember.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day, which in recent years has been seen as a holiday to kick off summer. In fact, over 57% of Americans plan to cook out tomorrow, consuming nearly 72 million hot dogs. But Memorial Day is supposed to be the day when we remember the men and women who gave their lives defending our country. Memorial Day reminds us that freedom is not free and it's certainly not cheap. Remembering helps us to know who we are.

But more than that, remembering helps shape what we do. Deuteronomy 6:12 warns us that after God has richly blessed us, "take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." God knows how forgetful we can be and says "remember." And he helps us remember. In John 14:26, Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will "remind you of all that I have told you." Remembering means believing and believing means life.

After Jesus was raised from death and ascended into heaven, his disciples remembered what Jesus had said, and it changed the world. Remembering shaped their identity and their activity. You see, remembering Jesus' words means being like Jesus and doing what Jesus did.

When you and I remember what God has done for us that we are unable to do for ourselves, three things happen. First of all, we are thankful which turns into worship. True worship happens when we come into the very presence of God, praising him for what he has done. You no longer come to worship looking to "get" something out of the experience. Rather, you come to praise God. As we sing and pray and listen to the Scriptures read and interpreted, as we participate in the Sacraments, the Holy

Spirit brings us into God's presence. That means that if you are truly worshipping, it can never be boring.

In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul said, "nothing can separate us from the love of God." And this is quite true. But sadly there is plenty that can separate God from our love. So the second thing that happens when we remember is that we change our behavior. You change the focus of your life from yourself to God. As you enjoy his gifts you spend more time thinking about the Giver. You actually WANT to do things like read your Bible and pray and give your time and money.

Finally, the third thing that results from our remembering is that we develop "Kingdom-vision." We recognize the ways that God provides for us and for others. We begin to see him at work in the world around us and we learn to expect it. When you know that he will provide for your needs, you learn to trust him. And you learn to be more like Christ.

My human nature is to forget. As I get older, forgetting becomes a bigger part of my life. But God says, "remember." I remember that I was dead in my trespasses and sins. But I've been delivered. I have been made alive together with Christ. When I remember that, I can't help but worship.

Amen.