

“Remember to Remember”

Ephesians 2:1-13 • Deuteronomy 6:4-25

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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They say there are two signs that we’re getting older. One is that we tend to forget things. For the life of me I can’t remember the other one.

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. Some of my earliest memories are still as clear today as they were over forty years ago. I can remember going to Disney Land in California when I was only three years old. I remember my first day of kindergarten. I remember the many family vacations we had when I was growing up. We all piled into our Buick station wagon full of camping gear and trekked across the country.

I remember the day I got married 29 years ago and I remember the days each of my children were born. These are all vivid memories for me even now. But I also forget a lot of things, too. 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. We 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, 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, but I forget what really matters? Why do I remember the way someone hurt me over 20 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 and 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, this is what he quoted. Why? Because he wants us to remember. 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 our inner self. We are to love God with our entire being – our desires and emotions, our 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, we are to love God with our "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 hang signs on your wall that you get from Mardel. You shall email these words to your friends and family and post them on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In other words, do whatever you need to do to 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. In fact, in Deuteronomy 5, in the Ten Commandments, God says for them to remember that they were once slaves. 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. In a few minutes when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we will hear Paul's words that "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Communion helps us to remember.

I am certain that most of you have visited the Alamo in San Antonio. If you grew up in Texas I think it was required by state law. And if you've been to the Alamo you know that you don't go there because of the fancy exhibits or because it's an impressive museum. You go because of what it represents in Texas history. It's part of our identity. The same is true of the various monuments in Washington, DC. They serve to remind us of who we are as a country. Memory becomes an important part of our identity. Remembering helps us to know who we are.

But more than that, remembering helps shape what we do. Verse 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. We no longer come to worship looking to "get" something out of the experience. Rather, we 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. 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. We change the focus

of our lives from ourselves to God. As we enjoy his gifts we spend more time thinking about the Giver. We actually WANT to do things like read our Bible and pray and give our 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 we know that he will provide for our needs we learn to trust him. And we 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 once a slave. But I've been delivered. I am no longer a slave to sin but a slave to Christ. When I remember that, I can't help but worship.

Amen.