



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING”

Scripture Lessons: Joshua 4:1-24; John 2:13-22

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, March 7, 2021  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A few years ago, I was blessed to lead a pilgrimage to Greece and the surrounding areas. Our itinerary basically had us following in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. We traveled to Athens and Patmos and Ephesus, and not surprisingly, throughout our travels, certain sacred and familiar Bible stories – they came to life in new and unexpected ways.

As I was preparing for this morning’s sermon, however, it was actually a somewhat secular landmark that actually came to my mind. We were on our way from Corinth to Thessaloniki, and we were passing through an area known as Thermopylae. We had stopped to stretch our legs, and, as we were preparing to load the bus again, our guide rather casually just said, “Oh, and if you want to see the plaque commemorating Leonidas and the 300 Spartans, it is on top of the hill over there.” “Well,” I said, “I really want to see that monument,” because like many of you, I had heard the story about King Leonidas and his battle with the Persian Emperor Xerxes...and I could remember a particular version of those words of memorial which have been attributed to the Greek Poet, Simonides of Ceos, “Go [and] tell the Spartans, thou that passest by, that faithful to thy precepts here we lie.”

After that brief deviation, I remember getting back on the bus and thinking to myself, “I wonder what else I have missed or nearly missed?”

Now, granted, no one can expect to see everything - even of religious significance - on a single pilgrimage, but it did bring to mind the importance of remembering and what it is that we choose to remember. As a general rule, those of us who live on this side of heaven, we have a very short memory, and I don't think it is a matter of something becoming less significant, it's just that over time, certain other things assume a more significant place in our memory.

Most of us have no idea the stories behind the beautiful memorials on our walls around the sanctuary. And I'm not suggesting that we are delinquent for not knowing them, but all things being equal, should we not know something more about the Resurrection Window to my right...or perhaps the plaque to my left which is in memory of Mitchell King - the one with the thorns and thistles etched into the bottom. I know that I, for one, will be one of the first participants when our docent ministry resumes in the spring, because even though I have heard certain stories before, I probably need to hear them again.

I once had a pile of stones in my backyard, and the idea came from our Old Testament Lesson this morning, and, whenever I looked at them - and I would look at them with some regularity - I remembered the story that Patrick read for us just a few moments ago. I remembered how when the people of God looked upon a similar pile of stones in a place known as Gilgal, that they would most assuredly have remembered how God had led them across the Red Sea, and how the waters had parted as they fled from the Egyptian Army; they would have remembered how God had also led them across the River Jordan as they entered into the Promised Land.

As fate would have it, those stones didn't make it into our yard here in Charleston, and, to be honest, I hadn't really thought much about that story. I hadn't thought about it at all until I was preparing this morning's sermon. And it is not that I had forgotten the story - I just wasn't remembering it!

Throughout the Bible, the importance of remembering is continually emphasized. In fact, over 260 times we have a variant of the word "remember" referenced in the Scriptures. For example, we are told to "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." Last week when we celebrated the Lord's Supper, we recalled again how it is that we, "Do this in remembrance of me." And, praise be to God, remembering is not simply a human endeavor...for the Lord, our God, also remembers!

Consider the story of the great flood. After the waters had subsided, God said to Noah, "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring the clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh." You see, even God knows the importance of remembering - to the point that God remembers our sins no more! Ah, what joy there is in knowing that petition that comes from the thief on the cross: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," and for Jesus to have said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Ah, such is the miracle of God!! For we have been remembered - we have been loved; indeed, by grace through faith, we have been saved!

Friends, that is our spiritual heritage - and that is the very thing that should be remembered in our hearts and in our minds above all else! But is that the case? I suppose it is, but it doesn't always come across that way, does it? And, here again, it is not that we would deny that God's

story of salvation is THE defining story of our life and of our life lived together, it is just that we choose to remember a lot of other stories as well.

Too often we talk about this and we talk about that, but we don't remember to talk nearly enough about the truth of God – about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not remember to talk enough about what it means to be the church called forth. We sometimes remember to talk about what it was like before the pandemic set in. We remember what it was like to worship without masks and to enjoy each other's fellowship before and after Sunday School. We remember what it was like to give each other hugs during the Passing of the Peace, and drop our kids off in the nursery and serve together in ways both historic and necessary, and we'll get back to all of that eventually. But that's not the remembering that I'm trying to emphasize. I'm talking about the remembering that is the matter of remembering who we are as Christ's Church at an even deeper and more abiding, if not theological level!

Remembering that this is the place where we gather together as the people of God to worship and to learn the stories of our faith; that Christ's Church is where we are invited to come and to learn how to speak about our Christian faith to others, and to share the difference that the presence of God makes in our life, especially in times of suffering and transition. Oh, I dare say, if there comes a point in the life of any church, which she no longer remembers those things, she will forget to be and do those things. Different habits and practices can begin to set hard like concrete, leading to a kind of spiritual lethargy whereby we begin to orbit a little further and further away from the life of the Christ's Church...and we begin to think that's ok. This is why, at least in part, we embark upon a variety of Lenten disciplines. You may recall how it was that when we began our Lenten journey, we did so with worship on Ash Wednesday, and if you were with us that afternoon, then you will remember that we encouraged one another to remember our humanity, our mortality, that from dust we have come and to dust we shall return.

Yet, just as surely as our mortality is important for us to remember, so it is also important to remember our life and our life abundant, which is why we engage in a variety of other means of grace – those other Lenten disciplines whereby we are drawn into closer company with God. I have found that through our Lenten disciplines as well as other disciplines throughout the year, we ourselves become a kind of living memory, perhaps not quite like John the Baptizer whom we know looked very much like a living relic – a prophet of old. No! It's just that, over time, our life can begin to be so unmistakably devoted to our Savior that it is as if there is literally a sign on our bodies testifying to our love for God and neighbor.

It begs the question: What about your life and mine reminds people of Jesus? Well, I think it is safe to say that none of us have any kind of supernatural power or strength to be found in any of us, and none of us have an inherent steel-trap of a spiritual memory...and God knows this! More to the point, God is well aware of the fact that we are prone to evil, that we're slow to do good. God knows that the crowning achievement of His creation is fickle and unfaithful...and for that reason, God has given us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Bible tells us will "teach us everything, and remind us of all that Jesus has said."

And isn't that wonderful and encouraging, if not amazing, that part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us remember! When we read our New Testament Lesson this morning, and we see

Jesus turning over the money changers – we know that it is the Holy Spirit that enabled those first witnesses to remember what else God had said – that the “zeal for your house will consume me.” And when we hear Jesus say, “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” – it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to remember that Jesus was talking about the temple of his body.

But, lest we forget, it is not simply a matter of remembering what Jesus has said that is important – it is a matter of allowing that memory to stir us out of our complacency and compel us to act and live differently. It’s what allows us to remember to say and sing as we did this morning. That “this is the day the Lord has made,” and to actually rejoice and be glad in it. Simply put, we do not remember for the sake of remembering; we are called to remember for the sake of living!

Consider just a few of the examples in the Bible of those occasions when a memory was an occasion whereby God affected change. I’m thinking of the time when Jesus reminded the disciples of having multiplied the bread and the loaves and the fish when he fed the 5000. He asked the disciples to remember that occasion because, at an entirely new and different moment in time, the disciples were preoccupied, and they were talking about bread. It turns out Jesus wanted them to remember that previous story in order to prompt a greater and more resilient faith in their present circumstance.

I’m thinking about the time when Peter remembered that Jesus had told him that before the cock crowed, he would deny him three times, and it was the very memory of Jesus’ words that allowed the Holy Spirit to be at work in his life and rebuke Peter and to make him feel ashamed. I’m thinking about how Paul encouraged the churches to remember the poor in their midst, and how he charged the people with that Biblical mandate – how that memory was intended to initiate a pattern of disciplined giving whereby they could actually meet the needs of the poor.

All of this is the stuff that our sacred memories are made of, Friends, and when God’s Spirit gets a hold of them, they jump off the pages of the past and they become like yeast in the cold wet dough of our lives, causing us to rise and to become the men and women that God has called us to be. They have the power to take those hard as concrete epitaphs which have begun to form the inscriptions of our lives and it bursts them into smithereens.

Oh, at the end of the day, for us to remember is for us to actually live as the people of God. Heaven forbid we find ourselves loading that proverbial bus – headed from Corinth to Thessaloniki...or wherever it is that we are going. Heaven forbid we turn to those traveling with us and say, as if in passing: “Oh, and if you want to see the cross of Jesus, it is on top of that hill over there.”

I can’t imagine that very integral aspect of who we are ever nearly being forgotten, can you? That someone might leave our presence without knowing that they had been in the company of a Christian? Our act of remembering must always serve us better than that, if for no other reason than God has served us better than that! Oh, pray we never ever forget to remember!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies.  
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