

“Remembering” by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. C2060101
Isaiah 61:10-62:3 and Luke 2:22-40
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I want to thank...what was his name? I forget his name! ... for my opening sermon illustration. There are two sure signs of aging. The first is a loss of memory. The second is....I forget!

I have a friend who is a court stenographer. He told me about a case involving a man who had lost his ability to remember. This may not seem like much to us at first. We have forgotten a person's name or a phone number. But, what if we lost all memory?

This man had been successful. He had a family and he built his own house. Then, he was in a motorcycle accident which injured his brain to the extent that he lost all memory. The dialogue in court went like this:

Lawyer: “What's your name?”

Answer: “I don't know.”

“Your name is Bill. Are you married?”

“I don't know.”

“Where do you live?”

“I can't remember.”

“Do you have any children?”

“I don't know.”

“What's your name?”

“I can't remember.”

He was asked what he would do with a letter he might find on the street. He did not know it was supposed to go to the Post Office. He did not remember about police and their function in society. He knew enough to start a fire in a fireplace, but he kept stoking it, not remembering how much fuel should be in a fire. Soon, there was a raging fire outside the fireplace. He even had to relearn to walk, but he still cannot walk normally because walking is predicated on memory.

Our memory is extremely important to normal functioning. We know just from the times that an anniversary or birthday has been forgotten! Memories from the past teach us how to live in the present and lead us into the future. We know a stove is hot because of prior experience with heat and stoves. If you are burned once, you can remember not to do the same thing to get burned again. George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”¹

Memories consist of cherished times with our children. We remember what they were like at birth, as toddlers, and in their later stages as they grow up. These are, for the most part, refreshing memories. We remember our childhoods, when grandparents took care of us or gave special gifts or attention. We remember the scoldings we received for doing things we shouldn't have. In the process, we learned to live in society.

Memories are involved in the maturation process. I remember the time my brother and I were throwing snowballs at cars. As fate would have it, he threw one that cracked the windshield on a

¹George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, Volume 1*, 1905, US (Spanish-born) philosopher (1863 - 1952)

Jeep. We had to face the driver's and our mother's anger. Because of that memory, I learned that one should not throw snowballs at cars! So, memories are at the seat of moral decision-making and judging between right and wrong.

In our adult lives as Christians, memories serve the important function of making us sensitive to others. We can remember how we felt when someone said we looked fat or skinny, or when another broke a special confidence. We remember how good it felt when someone stuck up for us or listened to our problems.

We remember and we can do two things with our memories. We can use them to make others feel loved and accepted or to make others feel miserable and wretched. We have been hurt, so we remember how to hurt others. We also remember Jesus' teachings about treating others the way we want be treated. So, we can make others feel good because remember how.

Childhood memories leave imprints on our lives, many of them good, warm, and comforting. Some, however, are terrible and leave long-lasting negative imprints our lives. Sometimes in the unconscious lies the memory of being molested, abused. It comes out from the memory later on to affect the present, causing a mistrust of others or the inability to be warm and friendly. Such negative imprints can destroy dating or affect marital happiness. Unpleasant memories can cause isolation or even hatred and destruction.

We cannot consciously remember everything. We store a lot of information, but we also have a built-in overload protection. Sometimes it takes time and effort get information out of our memories. We select what we recall from our memories, as any parent can tell us: "Where are your shoes?"

"I forget where I put them..

Children can tell us adults about selective recall too: "Remember? You promised I could go there!"

It is important to develop our sense of recall because we can remember the good and necessary things to the exclusion of negative. Negative imprints can be overshadowed by remembering the good ones.

Memory is an important part of faith. The Bible itself is an attempt to remember or keep in mind the actions of God in human history. During the early days of the Christian church there was no need to have a written account of Jesus and his actions. However, the original twelve apostles began dying off and the church recognized the need to write the gospels to remember the things Jesus taught.

The Bible contains records of God's "remembering" the covenant with God's people. God remembered Noah² and Rachel³ and gave them happiness.

The Bible contains accounts of God's remembering the evil works people did. There are other accounts of not remembering their evil deeds because the people asked for forgiveness and tried to do God's will. In some instances, the Israelites remembered their God and did the things God willed. In others, they forgot God and worshiped idols and other gods and consequently, the nation was destroyed.

For people in Biblical times, "remembering" had an additional connotation. To remember someone was actually to bring them back into existence. If no one remembered you after you died, you had no spiritual existence. That is why tombs and cemeteries were so important. One

²Genesis 8:1

³Genesis 30:22

would be remembered through one's children or through memorials such as gravestones, and therefore continued a spiritual existence.

For the Hebrews, to remember something was to bring it back out of past into the present. Remembering God's great saving acts of past meant that God was still doing saving acts in the present. How true that is when we stop to think about it. As we remember God's gifts and saving acts of the past, we are made mindful— we “remember”— that God is acting today. We see common events in a different light.

It was a series of interesting coincidences that brought me here to be the minister of this congregation. But, as I remember God's saving acts in history, I see that the coincidental events were not merely coincidences, but they were God's acting in my life. I “remembered” that God continues to act.

For the Hebrew people, religious worship consisted of reciting the story of their salvation by God in past. They would tell how they were slaves in Egypt and that God rescued them and took to a new land rich with soil and crops. This remembering brought God's salvation out of the past and made it present reality. Second Isaiah proclaimed that God would remember God's people and their salvation would shine like a torch.⁴ Simeon and Anna were thankful that God remembered the covenant with God's people in giving the gift of Jesus.⁵

In communion, as we eat bread and drink wine, we use Jesus' words of institution, “Do this in remembrance of me.”⁶ As we eat and drink, we remember Jesus' death which sets us free. We bring the action out of the past and make it a present action.

We are set free today. Jesus comes alive in us. He continues his spiritual existence in us today as we remember his past saving act.

Our memories are important because we learn through them. They also are important because they affect our present living. We remember fond childhood experiences and in this way bring to life today God's loving care for us. I remember the events of 2005 and I know that God is acting yet in history. Because I remember those events, I know I do not live in isolation. I know God is calling me to remember my sisters and brothers in need and to act to bring about justice and mercy. God also calls me to celebrate with thanksgiving those happy and positive events in world community life. I thank God for my memory, and I pray that I would use memory do good and to act with compassion. I pray that we would always remember God's mercy and thus keep God in our present.

⁴Isaiah 62:1

⁵Luke 2:27 and 38

⁶Luke 22:19