

## REMEMBERING

*Hebrews 1:1-2*

“When in times past God spoke to our forefathers, He spoke in many and varied ways through the prophets. But in this the final age he has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.”

This is a very rich set of verses. They contain in themselves the very heart of the Gospel and the central claim of our faith. Just pondering these verses can give enough food for thought for a whole theological tome. But I want this morning to touch on but one very small thing suggested by these beautifully rich compressed verses. I want to us to think about the ways of remembering embodied in these verses.

In these opening words the writer of this letter is inviting the community of Christians to whom he is writing to remember who they are, and in remembering who they are they will be reaffirmed in their faith.

We remember in so many different ways. Some time ago Enid and I were driving back to Hamilton after a weeklong conference in a village near the Hudson Valley. We had not gone more than fifty miles on the country roads when we realized that traffic was getting very heavy, much heavier than we were used to in those parts. Indeed it looked as though we were heading for some horrendous traffic jams ahead, so we started looking for an alternate route home. Then we saw a sign which told us what was up. We had forgotten that Woodstock II – the commemoration of the Woodstock Rock Festival of 1969 was being held in the Catskills – and thousands of people were converging upon the little village of Woodstock. We found our alternate route quickly and drove home in relative peace and not too much traffic.

The people were returning to the scene of the huge music happening of 1969, which many claimed to have celebrated the new found freedom of the 60's, all to the accompaniment of several days of Rock music – and lots of pot smoking. Memories of that festival drove many of the young and not so young celebrants of the original festival back to the fields of Woodstock again to relive those days of orgiastic freedom. As it happened, however, this twenty-fifth anniversary turned out to be a celebration of mud. It rained so heavily that the fields in which the concert was held were turned into a sea of mud. Nostalgia had turned into mud.

Some of our remembering is like that. We want to re-create the past, to set out before us once again the remembered pleasure of some past experience and somehow the nostalgic moment turns sour. The generation that saw freedom at Woodstock wanted to return again to find that experience of freedom, but what they found was that the times had changed.

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But the writer of the Hebrews does urge us to remember. “When in times past God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in many and varied ways through the prophets.” (N.E.B.) “Memory,” said Macbeth “is the warder of the Brain.” And what Macbeth could remember was the terrible deed he had committed in order to become king. And certainly memory has the power to haunt the mind.

There is a good sense, however, in which the power of memory is the warder of the mind and it is this good sense that the writer of Hebrews had in mind. What made Macbeth the King who could not evade the murderous deed of his past was the ever present memory of that deed. It was the memory of the deed that brought to Macbeth the awareness of who he really was and what he had become. The memory defined who he was. It was the collective memory of the people of Israel that helped them define who they were. As they remembered and recounted the many ways and the many times in which God had spoken to them they remembered who they were as a people. Memory was the warder of the collective soul of the Israelites.

They remembered God speaking in the rescue of Noah from the flood; they remembered God speaking in the moment that Abraham raised the knife to sacrifice Isaac; they remembered God speaking in the call of Elijah for rain upon the parched land; they remembered God speaking to them in the glorious acts of David and the Wisdom of Solomon; they remembered God speaking to them in the solemn predictive words of Isaiah. Above all they remembered God in the Great Covenant with his people given to Moses at the moment of the escape from bondage to Egypt. “Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord our one god; and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

And in their remembering they acknowledged that they were the people of God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses, and the prophets. This remembering defined who they were as a people.

We in our own lives remember in this way also. We remember the defining moments which make us what we are. This morning we had the joy of hearing about the 56<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of Henry and Sallie von Mechow. Two weeks ago we joined in celebrating Lorna and Reg’s wedding anniversary, and in another couple of weeks we will congratulate Rachel and Jim on their fiftieth anniversary. Anniversaries are not mere nostalgic moments in which we try to recreate a moment lost to time and embedded only in our memory. In the act of commitment of a solemn wedding ceremony, an act of promise was made, and in the remembering of that act we not only recreate the past, but we are prompted to remember who we are. An anniversary becomes a recommitment to that which makes who we are as a family. It is a recommitment to a past moment, not merely something remembered, a recommitment to a life lived and experienced through many years. In the remembering of the experience of a life of joy and suffering, hope and despair, pleasure and pain, we define who we are. In that recommitment we look to the past, not in a sentimental moment of nostalgia but as a reaffirmation of a bond that takes us into the future.

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It is this meaning of remembering that I want us to think about this morning. We remember that God has spoken in many ways and at many times and at the heart of our faith is the fact that God has spoken to us in Jesus. When we remember here at the Table of our Lord we are not going back to a nostalgic moment, but to a defining moment which makes us what we are and we move onwards with a renewed understanding of who we are.

It was God who showed himself in that life lived by the lakeside of Galilee and at the barren mound on which three crosses were set; God spoke in the moment of sacrifice and pain, and because he spoke we are who we are. Because he spoke in the pain of Calvary, we acknowledge that we are different because we look at the world differently and see it as one which receives its life and its sustenance from Him and not from ourselves. We see in others our fellow creatures, created as we are created by the one Lord of all. In our remembering a new vision of living enters our lives. We have been touched by the power of a new vision and we are different people, no longer indifferent to his coming. And we remember this.

This is the meaning of our communion this morning. Here we find the meaning of the words: "Do this in remembrance of me." In this quiet moment there comes to the inward eye of our memory the act that makes us what we are, and engages our whole being in a new moment of re-creation. This moment of remembering is not merely a flashback to a past, it is a living moment. We are presented with a past that is our present. The sacrifice on a cross in a distant land is our present moment of renewal of who we are and what we can be.

I have spoken of the way in which we consider anniversaries as important moments in the journey of our lives. On a wedding anniversary we not only remember that we are married, the occasion, the ceremony, the dress, the place and the joy of that moment, but in the remembering we recommit ourselves once again to the bond that was first forged in that ceremony. With that recommitment we reaffirm the first moment in this moment and look together to our future together.

We do this at this table today. We not only remember that Christ died for us, but in remembering we recommit ourselves to the power of that moment when God entered the life of mankind, and into our lives. We bring into our lives the living moment of the past as a part of our present experience. We not only look to the past, but we also open ourselves to that past as our present and commit ourselves to it as our future. In the breaking of the bread and the taking of the wine, we enter into the covenant there made, knowing the God is God, and we are his people. As John says: "It is the food that endures."

At this table we are joined together as one. Not in the teaching, but in our recommitment to the life of service, and in serving others we find a life worth living. The people who in their nostalgic look back to the Woodstock experience found that the past could not be recreated. They ended up walking in the mud of a past long gone. In our celebration at the communion table we

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do not look back to a past but live it in the present and the tokens of Christ's sacrifice are alive for our future lives.

A Prayer:

Lord Christ crucified for us. Help us to love, as you have loved. Help us to live as you have lived. Help us to be neighbors to others in their need as you in your mercy were neighbor to us and suffered and died for us. Amen.

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