

Sermon 20.11.22

Scripture: Psalm 65: 1, 9-13

Praise is due to you, O God...

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Deuteronomy 8: 1,2, 7-18

⁸This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.²Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness...⁷For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. ¹⁰You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that God has given you.

¹¹ Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep God's commandments, ordinances, and statutes, which I am commanding you today. ¹²When

you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous snakes and scorpions. God made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.¹⁷Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'¹⁸But remember the Lord your God, for it is God who gives you power to get wealth, so that God may confirm the covenant sworn to your ancestors, as God is doing today.

SERMON:

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness...

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God...
When you have eaten your fill... and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the house of slavery,

Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' ¹⁸But remember the Lord your God, for it is God who gives you power

Remember... do not forget...

these stories of Moses' leading the people from slavery, through 40 years of wilderness, to the promised land took place somewhere around 1200 BCE, but This part of the book of Deut., wasn't written down for another 600 years, during the reign of King Josiah, during a dark time in their history . The Israelites had been all but wiped out by the Assyrians, and then led by a series of kings, some, like Mannaseh, Josiah's father, **attempted to totally eradicate the worship of God, from the Jewish state.¹ It was only when The book of the law, found as the temple was being rebuilt in Josiah's time, that the Israelites restored their faith and worship of the One True God, Yahweh.**

So this story of Moses telling the people to remember - remember where you were, remember who you are, remember whose you are, became the story of the people who were rebuilding, centuries later, and is here for us today: Remember, do not forget,

Our psalm reminds us of this as well.

Praise is due to you, O God...

you provide the people with grain,

You crown the year with your bounty;

¹ <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/472239>

The psalmist remembers that it is God who gives all these things. They are not the work of human hands.

Remember.

Why this call, again and again throughout scripture, to remember?

We remember so that we can move forward with hope, with courage, as a resilient people, not being crushed by the challenges that surround us.

Jesus told his disciples 'remember this night' as they celebrated the passover that celebration of Remembering how God brought new life out of suffering.

Jesus gave us a new way to remember. Remember me, he said. Remember me, every time you break bread together, every time you are nourished. Remember that death does not have the last word. Remember that love overcomes fear. Remember, I am here, always with you.

We remember so that in times of struggle we are not paralyzed. We remember so that we can continue on the journey.

Remembering helps us stay balanced.

When my children were young, one Christmas a relative gave them a balance board.

They played and played on it, some getting the hang of it more easily than others.
(show this during the past sentence)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvO4iGk0hok> (first 10 seconds) MUTE

One of my sons, Jesse, spent a huge amount of time on it, mastering it to a level close to this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7wVMN5jDog> (5-10 seconds) MUTE

I never got the hang of it. I couldn't stay balanced for even a few seconds.

I called Jesse this week and asked him what it took to successfully navigate a balance board.

Right away he said: You have to have a willingness to fall. Know that that's going to happen and be OK with it.

And he went on - It takes total focus. When you're on the board you can't be thinking about something else. Need to concentrate on what's happening in the body, right now. Need to be fully present.

He said he loved that it was so dynamic - it was like a physical chess match - Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

As an adult, looking back, he feels it helped him learn to be OK with failure. Losing balance was, is, a part of mastery, no matter the task.

I tell that story, because I believe if we only look back, it throws us off balance. We look back to learn. We look back so we can look forward and move ahead with hope. And yet what we learn is not always easy and beautiful. Learning requires being OK with failure and a willingness to lose balance again and again.

Jesus' command to remember him is woven together with stories of betrayal and denial. In remembering, it's important to hold the whole story. I watched a video this week that's part of the Teaching Tolerance series put out by Southern Poverty Law Center, entitled "The Forgotten Slavery of our Ancestors²"

It's short - only 12 minutes long, teaching about the untold history of how over 5 million Native Americans were enslaved by the white European settlers. It blows apart our Thanksgiving narrative - this is a part of our history of which I was totally unaware. Paula Peters, educator and writer from the Wampanoag tribe, ends the video by saying "If you don't know the whole story, you're going to walk away with a fairytale."

Remembering, staying balanced, requires we learn the whole story, and that we sit with our whole story - all of it, the beautiful and the painful.

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<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/classroom-videos#forgotten-slavery>

We are at a time of moral reckoning here in our country - taking a hard look at what we choose to remember, and what we choose to forget. Whether it's our history from centuries ago, or the way we live into the reality of the stresses of politics and viruses.

We must remember, sit with our whole story, to stay balanced and find our way forward with hope.

Our scripture today also gives hints of a painful, complex past. Moses reminds the people of the promise God made to their ancestors - that they will inherit a land that is already occupied.

The displacement of people from the land is part of our religious history. It's a story as old as humanity. Here, from the beginning of our scripture, we learn stories of God blessing a chosen people, blessing them with land inhabited by others.

The story of Moses leading the people to freedom is a beautiful, faith-filled story that helps us remember, that gives us strength to look back from where we've come, and to move ahead with hope. And yet, a faithful remembering involves holding the whole story. Those blessed, and those forgotten. Remembering it all helps us stay balanced, helps us not turn our histories into fairytales.

Moses commands the people: Remember.

We remember so that we can make the Kingdom of God known, here and now. Yes, even now, during times like these. Times that feel dark, scary, with little hope can throw us off balance. This coming week, this celebration of Thanksgiving likely won't be like those we remember from years past. We may feel out of balance, both thankful and grieving the loss of traditions that bring joy.

Remembering helps us stay balanced. Giving thanks is a re-remembering. Giving thanks for what's here, right now - as meager as it may seem, is a way of staying balanced. AND this remembering through the lens of giving thanks helps us to be resilient - to change and adapt in ways that help us live out of a sense of hope.

We give thanks for those we love...

We give thanks for this day, whatever it holds.

We give thanks for our health, for as author Jon Kabat-Zinn writes: “As long as you are breathing, there is more right with you than there is wrong, no matter how ill or how hopeless you may feel.”³

We stay balanced by remembering the past and living, right now, in new ways - like the way one of you is going to share their Thanksgiving meal with neighbors. I love this resilient creativity - they've each chosen a part of the meal to make, and will deliver it to each others' front door by a prescribed time on Thanksgiving day. Eating by themselves, in their own homes, but not alone. Shared gifts of food and presence will nourish. New ways to give Thanks, together.

Staying balanced is also remembering that our reality is only one part of the larger world around us. Struggles for human rights and justice continue to rage in our country and around the world.

Hope, resilience, life, rise out of dark places.

In his book “Who Will be a Witness?” author Drew Hart tells story after story of Black prophetic voices. One was Henry Highland Garnet. Trained as a minister, Mr. Garnet called out the church for its failure to stand up for enslaved people. In his most famous speech, challenging the enslaved not to submit any longer to oppression, he urged: “Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! resistance!...Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race.”⁴

These African-American pastors and prophets of the late 1800's remind us to remember. Remember who you are, remember who gives life, who sets the captives

³ Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Random House Publishing.

⁴ Hart, Drew. 2020. *Who Will Be a Witness? Igniting activism for God's justice, love and deliverance*. Herald Press. P. 153.

free. Look back, remember, so that you can stay balanced, stay strong in the struggles of today, knowing that our hope is found in a faith that rises up out of bleakness.

We're going to end with a song by the group "Resistance Revival Chorus"⁵. it's a song of resistance; a song that speaks against the powers and principalities of this world, reminding us that our joy, our hope, our strength, our peace is found in something so much greater than anything this world has to offer. It's a song that has kept me balanced these past few weeks. Helping me remember to trust in the Living God, to labor for the peace of the human race. I pray you, too, find it so.

Confession prayer before communion:

Almighty God,
Whose breath quickened us,
Whose tongue named us,
Whose language we are:

Grant us grace to be true words--
Not gentle when it is in anger that we live,
Not smooth when it is desperation that we know,
Not patient when time has narrowed down to now,
Not wise, not neat, not all our fences mended,
But words, broken yet honest words, and lost,
Stumbling their way toward silence.

Take us back. Recall us. Then speak us once again.
Set us in order. Mend our shattered syntax. Set all our commas
straight.
Imbue in us a power that keeps company with pain,
Then march us across the pages of this beautiful, fragile, tormented,
and perishable earth to sing the songs of Zion.

⁵ "This Joy" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TbDPwA09Bc>

In the name of the Word made flesh, made dead, and made alive again.
Amen.

-Barbara Sargent