



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

Don't Forget Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Colossians 1:11-20

At a preaching conference a few year's ago, one of the featured speakers got up and began his sermon with these words: "I spent the best years of my life in the arms of a woman not my wife!" As the congregation gasped he said, "She was my mother!" And he continued on and preached a fine sermon on the virtues of motherhood.

A young preacher in attendance at the conference was impressed and decided to use this line in his sermon. As he stepped into the pulpit he was both nervous and excited, hoping to get the same reaction that the more seasoned preacher had. He looked at the congregation and with great gusto he said, "I spent the best years of my life in the arms of a woman not my wife." The congregation gasped just as he had hoped, but the young man paused because suddenly he could not remember the punch line. After a few nervous moments he said, "And for the life of me, I can't remember who she was!"

Memory—good memory—is important! The Jewish people know that. After World War II, a plea arose from the ashes of pain and sorrow brought about by the Holocaust: Never Forget! The Jews feared that the horrors of that tragic time would be lost in the dissipating mists of memory and with them the personalities of the millions of people who died. Never forget! The hope of that plea is that by not forgetting, we will be more likely to prevent similar atrocities from happening again. From looking around the world, however, I am not certain that we have been successful.

The aftermath of World War II was not the first time the Hebrew people had heard these wise words. Just before they were to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, a journey forty years in the making, a dream fulfilled after nearly 500 years, Moses stood before the children of Israel and preached his farewell sermon. His words were cautionary to be sure, but they were also uplifting, inspirational, encouraging. He offered them a message that would make their way in the new land easier and better. His words? Simple: Don't forget! Listen to them:

For 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, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a 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.

You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and 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. Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Deuteronomy 8:7-18

In contrast to the arid desert with its numerous dangers and the oppression of Egypt, the Promised Land offered everything the people wanted. Take care, Moses cautioned, that you do not forget that it is God your Creator who dreamed this wonderful world into existence and filled it with every good thing imaginable. Don't forget that it was God who heard your cries for help and freed you from Pharaoh's cruel hand. Don't forget that God has been your fellow traveler on this journey, watching over your movements by day and your rest at night. Don't forget that it was God who protected you from snakes and scorpions, starvation, thirst, and invading tribes. Do not forget that God has prepared a home and a future for you and your families.

Moses also urged his people not to forget the commandments and ordinances which God had given them to sustain their spirits. These

guidelines, now sacred to us as well, would enable the Hebrew people to live well in community. Earlier in this sermon, Moses reminded the people, “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus remembered this very wisdom when confronted by the Tempter in the wilderness. It is good advice—when you are enjoying the good life in your home, don’t forget where you have been and don’t forget the source of all good gifts. Don’t forget God!

Moses, a man fraught with self-doubt and plagued with shortcomings, reminded his people that it was God’s desire, God’s dream, God’s hope, and God’s will that the Hebrew children live well and without want in the land he had promised their ancestor Abraham. He also reminded them not to forget that they were indeed a chosen people. They were chosen, not simply to be the heirs of God’s generosity, but to be heralds of God’s goodness to the rest of the world. Don’t forget!

Obviously, we are not Jewish, though to be certain some of us have Hebrew ancestry in our family tree. Why do we need to know about Moses’ plea to the Hebrew people not to forget God?

Through Jesus Christ we are welcomed into the family of God and promised the abundance of life. Through Jesus Christ, we are claimed as God’s own children. As the Apostle Paul shared with his friends in Colossae, “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:11-14). We, too, are inheritors of the promise of God—a blessing fulfilled, not in a particular plot of land, but in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and, therefore, in the hearts and lives of God’s people.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the culmination of the Christian year. Next Sunday a new year of faithful observance will begin with Advent. During Advent, we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child and Christ’s return at the end of the age. Having welcomed the babe in the manger last Christmas and followed his movements and teachings during his earthly ministry, we recalled his crucifixion and resurrection last spring. We have

learned from his teachings through the summer and fall so that today we can truly praise Christ as the Lord of life—of our life! Today we rejoice that the fullness of life is a reality. We rejoice that the promise made by God belongs to us—and to everyone else. We rejoice that God’s dream is being fulfilled! We rejoice that Jesus is the Lord of all!

That is why, during a holiday like Thanksgiving, we sit around the table or in our pew or in some quiet spot and remember. We remember all of the goodness God has brought into our lives. We remember why we celebrate Christmas and Easter and every day that we draw breath. We remember who we are and why we are in the world. We remember that we are blessed by God and expected to be a blessing to the world.

That, too, is a fulfilment of God’s promise. Moses’ message to the Hebrew people and the mantra which arose after the Holocaust to never forget are not simply about remembering the past. To the contrary, they are primarily about how we will live into the future. The message is that God wants all people to enjoy life and to share in the bounty of earth. It is God’s gift to us all.

But how is everyone to know? And how can the Good News be shared? The promise to the Hebrew people is that God will bless them and make them a blessing to the people of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). Through Christ, we inherit that same blessing so we, too, are given the task of sharing the Good News with one another and the world. Not only do we let people know that the gift of abundant life is here now, we help deliver that gift to other people through ministry and sharing of the Gospel.

Sometimes we worry that we will not share the Gospel correctly, that we do not have the words or the proper actions to convey the love of God to someone else. When teaching a course on the Holocaust at City College in New York, the late Elie Wiesel, himself a Holocaust survivor, was challenged by his students who believed that in future generations the story of the Holocaust would be forgotten when the survivors were no longer around to tell the story. In response, Mr. Wiesel told this story:

According to legend, the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov, had a method for averting impending disaster. The Master of the Good Name would go to a particular spot in the woods, where he would light a candle and say a prayer. This would prevent the disaster.

Later, one of the Baal Shem Tov's disciples faced a disaster. The disciple knew where the place in the woods was, and he knew how to light the candle that had to be lit, but he did not know the correct prayer that had to be recited. Still, the disaster did not occur. Later, still another disciple was faced with an impending disaster. He knew the spot, but he knew neither how to light the candle nor the prayer to be recited. Still, the disaster did not take place. Finally, a later disciple also faced an impending disaster. He did not know where in the woods he could find the spot. He did not know how to light the candle. He did not know the prayer to recite. All he could do was to tell the story. This, too, averted the disaster.¹

None of us journeyed through the wilderness to enter the Promised Land. None of us endured the horrors of a World War II concentration camp. None of us sat with Jesus and listened to his stories. None of us witnessed the agony of his crucifixion or the joy of his resurrection. But we know the stories. And we know who created us and this wonderful world in which we live. We know who loves us with an unfailing love and who, through Jesus Christ has offered redemption and fullness of life to us all. We know the story. Our calling is to tell it. Don't forget, but don't forget to tell, either! Amen.

¹Lawrence J. Epstein, *A Treasury of Jewish Anecdotes* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995), 237-38.

November 26, 2017

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Our gratitude is not limited to a day or even to a brief season, O God. Day by day, we are aware that every good gift that comes our way is delivered by your generous hand. Our thanksgiving is meager compared to your generosity, but we are truly and deeply grateful to you.

It may be that when we enumerate our blessings and think of those people who are so important to us that we also become more mindful of the needs around us. So even as we offer our gratitude for the good things that are ours and the blessings that mark every day of our lives, we also ask for other help for the people we love.

We pray for healing and health for those who are ill. We ask for comfort and encouragement for those who grieve and are disheartened. We pray for wisdom and insight for all who face daunting decisions and courage for those who need to act now. We pray for the ministry of our congregation, the safety of our community, and the peace of our world. We especially remember the victims and their families of the people who were killed in a mosque in Egypt while offering worship to you.

Use us, O God, to bring hope and healing to one another and to the world. Help us to remember that we serve the Savior of the world, the One before whom all of creation bows in humble gratitude. We praise you, O Christ, and celebrate the redemption you offer the world.

Help us to better serve the community of faith to which you call us and help us to learn how to live in the world with hope and justice and love. Praise to you, O Christ. All honor and glory be yours. Amen.