

Myers Park Presbyterian Church

November 23, 2014

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Remember

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

During 2014, the other clergy and I are preaching on 52 words from the Bible. A word a week. These are foundational words for our journey of discipleship. Today the word is “Remember.” Israel is coming out of the wilderness and on the verge of entering the Promised Land. Moses gives them this admonition.

*¹¹Take 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. 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 wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He 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 gotten me this wealth.” ¹⁸But **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. ¹⁹If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. ²⁰Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.*

* * *

Moses warns the people;

*‘You are about to come into prosperity. Don’t forget who gave you power to get this wealth. But **remember** the Lord your God.’*

Why are we so prone to forget?

The Greek word is “hubris.” It means “excessive pride or self-confidence.” It’s usually associated with a lack of humility, a grandiose sense of self. In Greek mythology, it’s the story of Narcissus and Echo.

One day Narcissus was walking in the woods when Echo, a mountain nymph, saw him and fell deeply in love. She followed him but Narcissus sensed he was being followed and shouted, “Who’s there?” Echo repeated, “Who’s there?” She

eventually revealed herself and attempted to embrace him but he stepped away and rejected her. She was brokenhearted and spent the rest of her life wandering in lonely glens.

Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, learned of this sad story and decided to punish Narcissus. She lured him to a pool where he saw his own reflection and fell in love with it. He couldn't leave it. Imprisoned by self-love, he eventually committed suicide by withering away without nourishment. (britannica.com)

Extreme narcissism can be a psychological disorder with the following symptoms:

- a grandiose sense of self-importance
- preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance and beauty
- a belief that you are “special” and unique
- a need for excessive admiration
- a strong sense of entitlement
- exploitative of others
- a lack of empathy
- often envious of others
- and regularly shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes
(psychcentral.com/disorders/narcissistic personality)

There are various degrees of narcissism. It's easier to see it in someone else than it is to see it within yourself.

Narcissism is rarely thankful. It's impossible to be grateful if you are convinced you are self-made. Gratitude is rooted in the memory of someone's graciousness. To be grateful, one must have received something. To receive something places me in a position of dependency.

Our forefathers and mothers were able to **remember** and give thanks. In that first Thanksgiving of 1621, 102 men, women and children had sailed for 65 days to America on the Mayflower. They settled in Plymouth Rock and that winter lost 42 of their members. The next spring, two Native Americans, Samoset and Squanto befriended the 60 remaining settlers and taught them how to survive in the new land. So in the fall of that year, 1621, after a bountiful harvest, the settlers along with their Native American friends celebrated for three days, *remembering* the providence of God.

- Two years later there was a Thanksgiving celebration following a severe draught ended by a long, steady rain.
- 156 years later the 13 colonies would join for a Thanksgiving Day celebration after the victory over the British.
- Eleven years after that, in 1789, President Washington proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving in celebration of the completion of the Constitution of the United States.

- In 1863, 74 years later, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving, as the Civil War was coming to an end.

Each time there was a celebration of Thanksgiving, it was in response to an act of grace, or mercy, providence or care that followed a time of hardship and despair. They *remembered* something and the gratitude drove them to tables of celebration.

So what is it we have to *remember* as we come to our tables this Thursday?

- As was the case of the *Promised Land*, has there been a time in your life in which you came out of the wilderness and moved to a different place, a place of blessing and prosperity?
- Or like at *Plymouth Rock*, has God delivered you from a great hardship and time of sacrifice? Can you give thanks for some rain that has ended a long draught in your life?
- As the *Constitution* was celebrated, has something finally come to fruition in your life, something to be celebrated – a major accomplishment; a wedding, the birth of a child, retirement or some other significant accomplishment?
- As at the end of the *Civil War*, has there been some reconciliation in your life that God helped to orchestrate? Has a broken relationship been mended? Have sins been forgiven? Is there a place in your life, or in the life of someone whom you love, in which the battle is finally over and the victory is won and it's time to *remember* and give thanks?

This word *remember* is a powerful word in the Bible. It's the antidote to forgetting and is the gateway to gratitude. One of the many dangers of living in prosperity is that of forgetting our dependency upon the Lord. Our wealth and power become an idol to be worshipped and adored. Our narcissism increases, and yet, all God would have to do is shut off the air for just two minutes and everything we have and are would come to a screeching halt. The average person would gasp for air after only 30 seconds. That's how independent we really are.

So why are we so prone to forget? What is it that lures us into living with such hubris? Are we foolish enough to measure success by monetary standards and by our possessions? Jesus pointed to a poor widow giving her pennies to the Lord and elevated her above all the rich who gave great sums because she was in the proper position with God. She was humble. She was grateful. She *remembered* the grace of God and responded to it out of her poverty.

Thanksgiving is not always about abundance. It's not always about abundance. It's about *remembering* the many ways in which the Lord has sustained us in times of scarcity, pain, suffering

and sacrifice. The gratitude is in the memory, not in the possessions. It is possible to be thankful and to be poor.

It's a gracious warning that was given to the people of Israel as they entered the Promised Land.

*When you've enjoyed the food, the houses, your herds and flocks, your silver and gold; be careful not to exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery, who led you through the terrible wilderness, who made the water flow for you and fed you with manna to humble you and test you. 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...' (8:11-18a – paraphrased)*

As we come to our tables of Thanksgiving, let us *remember* the Lord our God and give our thanks and praise!

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

Congregation: **Amen**