

Jesus, Remember Me

*Sermon preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast
Olentangy Christian Reformed Church
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Luke 23:33, 39-43

It was time to carry out the death sentence against Jesus.

And when they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified him and the two criminals there, the one on his right, the other on his left.

Now one of the criminals hanging there was insulting him: “You’re the Messiah, aren’t you? Save yourself – and us!” But the other rebuked him. He said, “Don’t you fear God? You’re under the same sentence – justly! We’re getting what we deserve for what we did. But he didn’t do anything wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “It’s true; you will be with me in paradise today.”

Children’s Story

Once, on the far side of the Great Forest, Sammy the Squirrel fell out of a tree. He landed on his head. He was stunned – so stunned that he didn’t remember where he was, so stunned that he didn’t remember who he was.

He wanted to go home. But he didn’t remember where home was. He wanted to see his family. But he didn’t remember who his family were. He didn’t even remember his own name.

He was lost in the Great Forest. And he was lost to himself. He was alone, alone, alone.

When Sammy didn’t come home, his mom and dad went to look for him. They called his name as they went. And they waited to hear him call back to them. But he didn’t know to call back to them, because he didn’t know they were calling his name. He didn’t remember his own name.

Sammy didn’t remember. But his mom and dad remembered. They remembered what he looked like. They remembered how he walked. They remembered his name.

And when they finally found him, they took him in their arms, brought him home, and looked after him every day until his memory returned.

It sure was a good thing that they remembered him.

Sermon

We want to remember

And we want to be remembered.

We want to remember. After World War II, Eva Hoffman immigrated with her family from Poland to Canada. Here’s something from her 1989 memoir ([Lost in Translation](#)):

I am walking home from school slowly, playing a game in which it’s forbidden to step on the cracks between the slabstone squares of the pavement. The sun is playing its game of lines and shadows. Nothing happens. There is nothing but this moment, in which I am walking toward home, walking in time. But suddenly, time pierces me with its sadness. This moment will not last. With every step I take, a sliver of times vanishes. Soon, I’ll be home, and then this, this nowness will be the past, I think, and time seems to escape behind me, like an invisible current being sucked into an invisible vortex. How can this be, that this fullness, this me on the street, this moment which is perfectly abundant, will be gone? It’s like that time I broke a large porcelain doll and no matter how much I wished it back to wholeness, it lay there on the floor in pieces. I can’t do anything about this backward tug either. How many moments do I have in life? I hear my own breathing: with every breath, I am closer to death. I slow down my steps: I’m not home yet, but

soon I will be, now I am that much closer, but not yet . . . not yet . . . not yet . . . Remember this, I command myself, as if that way I could make some of it stay. When you're gown up, you'll remember this. And you'll remember how you told yourself to remember.

We want to remember. Remembering keeps the past from slipping away.

We also want to be remembered. Mrs. Cobb is a crusty, yet delightful character in Gary Schmidt's book Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy. Mrs. Cobb is an old woman, a very old woman, who for some time has been facing death straight on, facing death with a strategy. Here's what she said to twelve year old Turner Buckminster: "I'm going to die in this room . . . I'll be sitting here reading and I'll set the book aside on that table and lay my head back right here. And then I'll fall asleep. Just like that. Fall asleep."

There was a problem, however. "The only thing I'll regret," she said, "is that nobody will hear my last words."

So she hatched a plan. Turner Buckminster would visit her every day. Paper and pen would always be at hand. As soon as she had died – assuming Turner would be there at the time – he would write down what her last words had been and report them to the townspeople.

This was very important to Mrs. Cobb. As she put it to Turner Buckminster: "People are always remembered for their last words. They're almost like a message from beyond the grave."

We want to be remembered. Being remembered keeps us from slipping away.

We want to remember, but we forget; we want to be remembered, but we are forgotten. We don't want to remember everything, of course. As Bruce Cockburn wrote, sometimes "your heart's beset by memories you wish you'd never made." But there are treasures in our memories, treasures we don't want to lose. Turning a line drive to second base into a single-handed double play. Shivering with pleasure at a first lingering kiss. Laughing with a group of dear friends whose names and faces you promise yourself never to forget. We don't want to lose any of that, but we do.

Last week, Jan and I watched the movie *Away from Her*. It's the story of a couple in late middle age, still much in love. But the woman is succumbing to Alzheimer's. Despite heroic efforts, she forgets where to put clean dishes. Then she forgets how to get home. Then she forgets her husband.

We forget. But we want to remember.

And we want to be remembered, too.

Being remembered has its advantages. It worked out very much in Androcles' favor that the lion remembered the thorn that had been in his paw and remembered Androcles' kindness in removing that thorn.

We want to be remembered, but that's a losing battle. Die before you make your mark in this world, and soon you will be forgotten. Live to be one hundred, and most of the people who would have remembered you will already be dead! Psalm 103 puts it this way:

As for human beings, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more (vv. 15-16).

About forty years ago, Mark and Barb G. honeymooned in the Rocky Mountains. Since then, the mountains haven't changed . . . Mark and Barb remember the mountains; the mountains have no memory of them.

Mrs. Cobb (back to Lizzie Bright) was very careful about her last words. Last words, she knew, needed to be planned. She told Turner Buckminster, "You don't get two chances to say your last words, you know." And so Mrs. Cobb had drafted a reasonably profound final utterance, words sure to be

remembered, and she along with them. Despite her planning, though, Mrs. Cobb was taken by surprise. Her last words? “Oh hell, it’s warm in here. Get me a ginger ale.”

We want to be remembered, but we are soon forgotten.

Yet Jesus remembers us, for good. We remember Jesus’ last words. We refer to *Seven Sayings from the Cross*. They range from “Father, forgive them” to “into your hands I commend my spirit.” And we also remember the last words of the two who were crucified with Jesus, or at least their last recorded words. With the one, words of insult and scorn; with the other, a plea. “Jesus,” he said, “remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

I don’t suppose he planned those words. Not like Mrs. Cobb. Her request for ginger ale, though reminiscent of Jesus saying from the cross, “I’m thirsty,” was hardly where she intended to finish. She had something better than that planned. I don’t suppose the one who was dying next to Jesus had planned his words, “Jesus, remember me.” But they were good words, words that assured he would not be forgotten by us.

More important, however, were the words of Jesus. Jesus said to him, “It’s true; you will be with me in paradise today.” In other words, “I will remember you.”

It is characteristic of God to remember. God is older than all the ages. Yet God’s mind is sharp. There is no weariness. There is no dimming of the memory. There is no headlong tumble into the forgetfulness of dementia. Not with God! God remembers.

God remembered Noah. God remembered Rachel. When Joseph was forgotten by the Egyptians, God remembered Jacob’s family and his promises to them; God remembered Abraham. God remembered Jesus in the tomb. God remembers his people. God remembers you and me.

When we no longer remember ourselves, God remembers us. Jan’s Grandma Haagsma, in the last years of her life, forgot nearly everything. She forgot where she was. She even forgot who she was. But she did remember one thing. And she said it again and again: “The Lord is so good to me.” Her remembering that, when she had forgotten everything else, I take as a sign of God’s remembering her. God remembers.

“Can a woman forget her nursing child?” the LORD asks through the prophet. “[She] may forget,” the LORD answers. “Yet I will not forget you” (Is. 49:15). God remembers.

And so Jesus remembers us, for good.

We forget and we are forgotten. Memories fade and we fade with them. We see it around us. We see it in our loved ones. Maybe we’re beginning to see it in ourselves. And it scares us.

We don’t want to forget. We don’t want to be forgotten. We don’t want to be alone. We don’t want to be outside, with no memory of how to get home.

So we pray, each one of us, “Jesus, remember me. When I don’t even remember myself, remember me.”

And it’s true: Jesus does remember us.

He remembers us, for good.