

More than a memory

Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot)], "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here. (John 14:23-31 ESV)

At home if one of us wants the other to remember something, we generally say it ... 'Please remember ...'. If we're getting ready to leave for the day or week with all the last minute things that need doing – maybe the banking or watering the plants or putting out the bins or checking something or ringing or emailing someone – then we tell each other but maybe it's a little rushed – speech is faster. But if we want the other person to definitely remember it – to know that it is important to us – we write it down. Now I'm just talking about basic housekeeping / living together stuff – with all patterns and expectations of nearly 35 years of marriage known. Yet we still forget things – but less so if we write them down.

Now take that thought – communicating important things – wanting people to remember and do – and now turn up the dial of emotion and tension and place it in an environment of departure possibly death – and what do you think you will remember? Well, it will be something. But whether it is the whole thing or the important thing, I'm not so sure. When people go to the doctors for their results and a consultation, it is a good rule of thumb to take someone with you because as soon as you hear the diagnosis – especially a serious one – your chances of remembering everything is lessened.

Each of us has ways of helping us remember. Each of us is better at it if the person asking us to remember is in front of us. Each of us knows that remembering is harder when people are absent, when time is moving on, when emotions are involved, even if things are written down.

Who remembers what they had for breakfast last Pentecost?

We are here this morning still gathered around Jesus because on the last night of his life on earth – a time filled with emotion – he took apprehensive and confused men on a journey from an Upper Room where he had changed the most previous Jewish ritual of all and centred it on himself as the Passover Lamb and priest combined, then down to a garden teaching them all along the way about what was happening. The lesson – including the practical part of praying – was interrupted by an arrest. Time's up. Class over. What did you remember?

With our human track record of memory, no wonder the world looks at the Christian Church and shakes its head and says 'fantasy'. Even with things written down, there are disputes and disagreements. And yet this single individual, Jesus, is still remembered as is his Father and people are still loving him – that's more than memory – and obeying him – that's more than memory – because he's not just a memory. The Easter message will not – cannot – be stopped – because the truth is that the grave is empty. Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Easter is remembered because of Pentecost. Not only is there Jesus and his Father but together they send the Holy Spirit and his single task is to help us remember. We often talk about sin as rebellion against God, pollution, missing the mark or the target but we might also describe it as amnesia or forgetfulness – God’s grace doesn’t stick – and when we face a new day we start from the point that we are all alone – life is up to us – seize the day for yourself – and forget what God has done yesterday (if we noticed) because our senses tell us that we are alone – we don’t see or hear or touch Jesus – it’s just us in this world. ‘That’s why you need a Helper’ said Jesus. ‘The Holy Spirit is not a history teacher per se but is the Supply Sergeant who brings you what you need for today – Me.’

Nearly 1500 years after Jesus’ lesson on that night, Martin Luther would write his Small Catechism designed for the head of the household to teach the household part of which says: *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.*

This is possible because Jesus is risen and ascended and so he comes to us here in Brandon – and wherever we find ourselves. We do not sit here in a holy huddle and think back to the past. It is far more contemporary than that. We do not remember peace but receive it – not the serene feelings of bliss – but the declaration that there is no battle or war between us and God for he has made peace with us through his encounter with us – Baptism, Holy Communion, the absolution – which link us to the cross. There is no need to fear this God of the cross and empty tomb but instead remember who he is – and who we are.

This remembering isn’t just in our heads. It is not us pulling thoughts into focus but it is more Jesus coming to us and that affects our behaviour – what we do as we read his Word, as we live through each day, as we gather on the Lord’s Day – all the time not seeing or hearing Jesus with our senses – but rather the Holy Spirit is bringing Jesus to us where he works on, relates to, guides, supports, and helps us grow in him. They say athletes in particular have what’s called ‘body memory’ but really everyone learns to do things a certain way – the body remembers what to do. As we gather around Word and Sacraments so we exhibit ‘body memory’ – we are Jesus’ Body – he is the head – and he helps us live with him in this world – and this body memory is marked by daily repentance. There’s that memory needed again – I’m not the centre of the universe. I’m a sinner. Remember that. Jesus has saved me. Remember that. Now live with those two truths. Thank you, Holy Spirit.

Rise, let us go from here.