

A REMINDER TO REMEMBER

John 14: 23-29

I love the story of the two senior couples walking down a trail. The women were about six paces in front of the two men. One guy said to the other, “My wife and I ate at a great restaurant last night. Good food, lovely décor, great prices.”

The other asked, “What’s name of the place?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I can’t remember.” Then he asked his inquirer, “What’s the name of that red flower with thorns on the stem?”

His friend answered, “You mean a rose?”

“Oh, yeah,” he nodded, and then he declared, “Hey Rose, what’s the name of the place we ate at last night.”

Many of us struggle to remember names, addresses, phone numbers, dates, and passwords. I often ask Joanie to remind me of something, to help me remember. “Remind me to call the dermatologist,” I’ll say. She’ll tell me to write myself a note and tape it to the bathroom mirror. I used to keep a Daytimer to schedule appointments and meetings. Now I do it on my phone. God forbid I ever lose my phone. Life would become a confused mess, even in retirement.

I am jealous of people with good memories. Perhaps you remember Jerry Lucas, an All-American basketball player at Ohio State and star in the NBA. He had an amazing memory. He performed near miraculous feats of memory. He wrote about his memory techniques and published them. I’ve had only modest success with his techniques, but others swear by them.

With so much in the news about Alzheimer’s Disease and various forms of dementia, many people want to know more about memory loss and how to keep memory as sharp as possible. The other day I received a newsletter from Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai

Hospital titled, "Focus on Healthy Aging." It's only eight pages long but it has two articles on memory: "Tuning Up Your Memory" and "Are Your Memory Lapses Normal?" On Friday I received a brochure from Harvard Medical School advertizing a new booklet titled: "Best Ways to Preserve, Protect, and Improve Your Memory." I was going to bring it to show you but I forgot where I put it. Obviously memory issues are at the forefront of many folk's concerns. Most everyone I know wishes he/she had a better memory.

Jesus recognized our dilemma. Just before his crucifixion he promised his disciples to send the Holy Spirit to abide with them and remind them to remember all that he had said to them, so that when he was gone from them, they'd still believe. That same Spirit comes to us at baptism and still dwells among us for the same purpose.

All of us are confronted with occasions in which we need to be reminded to remember Jesus, that is to recollect what and why we believe. On a national scale 9-11 was such an occasion. Some folks claimed it was God's judgment upon our decadence and a just punishment. Others found themselves questioning the sovereignty and love of a God who didn't prevent such an atrocity from befalling innocent victims. Others said to leave God out of the equation; it was a matter of human hatred. Anytime life forces us to ponder "why?" we need to remember what we believe to be true and why.

In ministry I've had many occasions when I've had to mull over those questions. When Todd McClay drowned in Conneaut Lake at age 18 after just graduating from high school, I knew I'd better be clear about why and what I believed. I was going to have to preach to his grieving parents and brother, and a sanctuary packed with bereaved teenagers. They needed an honest and clear response to their pain and questions. Because that lake is so deep and cold, it took two weeks for Todd's body to surface. I used every spare moment to think and remember. I

thank God I didn't have to do so alone. The Holy Spirit was there reminding me of all Jesus said. The Holy Spirit is here for all of us all of the time.

In today's reading from John's gospel, Jesus prepares to leave his disciples. He's shared a final meal with his twelve best students and friends on the night before his crucifixion. Now he tells them he'll soon leave them. It could be an occasion for great despair and for a while it is. However, Jesus tells them not to worry because he'll be sending the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate. The Spirit's task will be to remind them of all Jesus said and did and to teach them the significance of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus promises to not leave them alone on their own. He's leaving but he'll give them an Advocate. In Greek the word is "*paraclete*". It means one who comes alongside. It can be translated as "counselor", "comforter", or "instructor" as well as "advocate". Jesus promises that God the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name to come alongside them to counsel, comfort, and instruct. "I'm leaving you," he says, "but don't feel abandoned. I'm sending my spiritual presence to be with you. He will teach you and remind you to remember all that I've taught you. He'll explain it to you as he goes with you."

I've been to Edinburgh, Scotland three times. The first two times I went to Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace, Arthur's Seat in Old Town, Sir Walter Scott memorial, the train station, and Princess Street in New Town. I loved it. However, I really saw Edinburgh on my third trip, because that's when I got a week of daily tours of the city by my friend Andrew Purves, who was born and raised there. Once again I saw the major points of interest, plus bookstores, pubs, playgrounds, flats, and local people from the perspective of one who knew Edinburgh intimately and personally. There is no substitute for one who'll come

alongside and personally point out things trivial, humorous, heartwarming, and instructive as my friend did for me.

Jesus kept his promise on Pentecost. As we heard in the reading from Acts 2, while the disciples were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit suddenly swept upon them as a mighty wind and flames of fire. A crowd formed out of curiosity. They'd come to the city from many foreign locales to celebrate the Pentecost harvest holiday. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples began to speak in the foreign languages of the ethnic groups in the crowd. They told the crowd of all that Jesus had said to them. Luke reports that about 3000 responded to the disciples' message and asked to be baptized.

Jesus promised the Twelve he'd send the Holy Spirit to them and he did. The presence of the Holy Spirit is promised to us as well. That's what we need in Eastertide. We live most of our lives, literally and figuratively, post-Easter. It is great to be in worship on Easter. The music is grand; the message is positive; the pews are fuller; the lilies are lovely; and the spirit is joyful. But what about the six Sundays after Easter? The lilies are wilted; many folks have faded away; special music is a memory; and the atmosphere is subdued. What now?

That is similar to the way faith plays out in life. There are bright, joyous moments when it is easy to believe, followed by stretches in which we ask, "What is it I believe again? Why do I believe that?" It's in this post-Easter state of affairs that today's gospel reading speaks. We get the Advocate to remind us of all that Jesus said.

The Holy Spirit has already done much of the work of reminding us of what Jesus said. He did so by inspiring the composition of the New Testament. It's there we find Jesus' words. When I say the Spirit inspired the composition of the New Testament I do not mean he directed or dictated every word as fundamentalists insist; I mean he

subtly moved its authors to write and guided them in what they chose to write about. As Jesus said, *“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I’ve said to you.”* And at the conclusion of his gospel John wrote, *“Jesus did many other things which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that though believing you may have life in his name.”* (John 20:30-31).

We do not have the Bible by coincidence but by providence. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to know and recall all that Jesus said to us. It is the first way the Spirit helps us to remember what and why we believe. Open your Bible every day and read a portion of a gospel. Over time you’ll know them so well that Jesus’ words and actions will be so locked in your memory as to give you *“life in his name.”*

All of us have experienced the work of the Holy Spirit/Advocate in our lives, though we may not have been fully aware of it in the moment. I mean occasions when a Bible verse pops into your mind from “out of the blue” or you find yourself humming a hymn. These are hints of the Spirit’s presence with you and influence on you. Moments such as when you are reading an old, familiar Bible story, and a word or phrase in the text jumps out at you and shakes or comforts you, are not coincidental. They are indications you have an Advocate nearby.

Or, perhaps you are going through a rough time. You feel alone and confused and ask, “Why did I ever believe that stuff?” Then later in worship a prayer, hymn, anthem, reading, or even a sermon helps you remember why you are a Christian. “Now I remember,” you tell yourself. “I am God’s beloved child, precious in God’s sight. Jesus tells me so.” Your Advocate has visited again.

We only get a full-blown Easter once a year. But the beauty of Sunday worship is that we can return every week to get a reminder of Easter joy. Every Sunday we remember and recollect what Jesus said and did. Though this is certainly not the only place the Holy Spirit/Advocate works, here is where and when he usually does his best work.

Jesus is no longer physically present, but he has not left us alone. We're not abandoned. We have the Holy Spirit. Our Advocate counsels, comforts, and strengthens. He brings to mind all that Jesus said and did. He enables us to have abundant life in Jesus. That is something we must never forget. But don't worry. If it does escape our memory, he'll remind us to remember.

Sources:

- *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 34-36.