

Sermon: Overcoming Spiritual Amnesia

Today across the United States and in several other countries we celebrate Mother's Day. There is no, one, universal, Mother's Day as different countries and different traditions celebrate Mother's Day on a wide variety of dates. Janice and I always struggle to remember that in the United Kingdom, Mother's Day, is the 4th Sunday in Lent! Since there are no cards in the stores nor ads on TV it has passed us by a few times and over the years we have lived stateside our mothers have occasionally let us know that we missed it – again! One of the origins of Mother's Day come from the day more properly known as Mothering Sunday – a Sunday to recall the main church of the district or the church in which a person was raised in the faith. Such a day was a reminder of people's faith origins, a chance to remind them of the faith in which they were raised. And isn't it true today that many of us rejoice because our mothers and grandmothers and maybe even great-grandmothers kept on reminding us of the faith in which we were raised and which ought to be lively and important to us!

This sermon is about such memory, faith memory, aiding all of us in overcoming spiritual amnesia so that we can be sure of our true identity as the people of God, claimed in Jesus Christ, invited and called to a new way of life based on faith and love and service to others.

A Story about identity problems, about owning up to who you are: "A guy was driving when a policeman pulled him over. He rolled down his window and said to the officer, "Is there a problem, Officer?" "No problem at all. I just observed your safe driving and am pleased to award you a \$5,000 Safe Driver Award. Congratulations. What do you think you're going to do with the money?" He thought for a minute and said, "Well, I guess I'll go get that drivers' license." The lady sitting in the passenger seat said to the policeman, "Oh, don't pay attention to him - he's a smart aleck when he's had a few beers." The guy from the back seat said, "I TOLD you guys we wouldn't get far in a stolen car!" At that moment, there was a knock from the trunk and a muffled voice said, "Are we over the border yet?""

As the hour of Jesus' arrest and death approached, as the anxiety level of the disciples rose like a thermometer placed in an outdoor parking lot in August. As all sorts of questions, uncertainties and fears swirled around the group of friends, Jesus offers the disciples the promise of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whose role would be to remind the disciples of who Jesus was and all that Jesus has said to them.

The ministry and activity of the Holy Spirit was and is all about helping overcome spiritual amnesia and memory loss, reassuring Christians and the Church of the presence of our Lord with us and for us. The Holy Spirit reminding us whose we are and the One we are to serve.

My guess is that on Mother's Day and on other special holiday occasions that your family has its way of reinforcing and celebrating its shared memory through the telling of stories, the special foods served to mark particular holidays, the photographs that encapsulate that family wedding or vacation or graduation. Isn't it true that sometimes, even when we tell and hear stories about loved ones who are no longer present with us, it is as though they are still with us, still around the table. That in the moment their memory, their presence is rekindled through the sharing of what they did and said and acted and lived.

This act of memory is one of the primary ministries of the Christian church. For sure in our church as in most churches we share together in a variety of important ministries, the ultimate meaning of these

Sermon: Overcoming Spiritual Amnesia

ministries grows out of our living memory of the one to whom we belong, the one we serve, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 14 we hear Jesus say that this memory work happens in and through the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” That good promise abides with us still, for still the Spirit works to stir memories of the Christ, of his words and deeds, of his calling and comfort, of his persistence and his peace.

To be sure, what Christ asks of his disciples is not passive recollection, not wallowing in the past, but active, engaging memory. As a group of disciples, as a church, we have a need, a deep, serious, need to talk about, discuss, sort out, and clarify our memories of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We need to share our common stories, our own sacred sojourns, in such a way so that we can relate our memories to the shared memory of the Christian family throughout the ages. In an age of too many “spin doctors”, way too much deception and falsehood, in the age of stealth synthetic derivative assets, the memory work of sharing our Christian memory helps preserve the truth! We have the presence and the influence of the Holy Spirit helping us to remember such that we can focus on a larger truth than the world is apt to forget and forgo much of the time – that despite all manner of terrible things done to us and done by us, God’s purposes of live will endure and be brought to fulfillment.

Through the renewal of our Christian memory we are helped us to understand who we are and to engage the world around us more faithfully, in the manner of, through, on behalf of, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Memory serves to preserve the truth, it overcomes spiritual amnesia, it helps us to understand ourselves, and it fortifies us with courage and hope so that we can move forward in faith.

**JESUS’ TEMPTATION – IN THE WILDERNESS, IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, JESUS WRESTLED WITH CHOICES AND WAS ENBALED TO BE CERTAIN OF GOD’S WAY BY RECALLING MEMORY WORK NOT FALLING FOR THE SHORT CUTS OFFERED BY THE TEMPTER.**

Being together, regularly and weekly in the fellowship of God’s people on the Lord’s Day is not the only way to be together with Jesus, but it is a most crucial and important way of being with our Lord. It is a place and a time and an occasion of overcoming spiritual amnesia, of being reminded that we belong to God, to one another and to God’s purposes of love and renewal in the world.

For many of us being together in church and in worship on a Sunday is the only place we go during the week . . .

Where we are asked to ponder matters that are deep, important, and demanding.

Where we are encouraged to take responsibility for someone beyond the bounds of their immediate family.

Where we are known by name; where we are missed when we are absent.

Where we participate in beautiful music, in a beautiful setting; beauty made by those simply for the love of it.

Where our children are loved and adopted by people who are not their relatives.

Where we hear talk of a subject that is so often avoided in most of our everyday speech and daily relationships; namely, God.

Sermon: Overcoming Spiritual Amnesia

Where there is talk about our individual and social failures, our culture's weaknesses, and our sin.  
Where there is intimacy and deep community without fear of sexual pressure.  
Where we are treated as valuable worthy people, no matter our income or our address

It is a scene we have all seen! We are driving along the Interstate, like everyone else we are stretching the speed limit and then for some inexplicable reason everyone around us slows down. The presence of the Police or Highway patrol car draws us into what we could call, "The Halo Zone." All the drivers suddenly behave like angels, they decrease their speed, no one will overtake the police, we gather around, we cluster around this new focus, hoping all the while that he will take off in pursuit of some unsuspecting speedster or stop for a bathroom break at the next exit.

This is a picture of who we are and what we are asked to be and to become as we share together in the life of the church, gathered around our Lord, drawn together by our Savior, brought into a relationship by Jesus. We are called and invited to live out of our Christian memory, aided by the influence of the Holy Spirit as we travel with and close to Jesus, travelling in the same direction and at the same speed as Jesus, travelling with and alongside the others who are journeying with the Lord.

Paying attention to God – you belong to God, God loves you, God has stuff for you to do and be  
Paying attention to the people of God – called to unity of purpose and service  
Paying attention to the people God loves – called to share love with all  
Paying attention to people in need  
Paying attention to the future into which God is today calling us

There is a lot at stake in overcoming spiritual amnesia, there is no one magic formula that can make everything fall into place – it takes our commitment and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. At stake are our lives, our lives with God, our lives within the Church of Jesus Christ, our lives as servants. At stake is the world in all its need in which we are called to serve. At stake are God's purposes of love and hope and peace and joy entrusted into our hands. As we are together, gathered, in fellowship and friendship, worshipping the God who is love so also by serving together we love the God whom we worship. This is our identity, our role, our purpose – we are friends and followers of Jesus Christ – this is who we are. Loved by Jesus we love on behalf of Jesus. Amen.