

Weekly Devotion for August 17, 2020
By Pastor Matt Woods, Grace Lutheran Church

“Remembering and Forgetting”

I don't know about you but I forget things sometimes. I am singularly focused most of the time. I really only do one thing at a time. I'll give you an example with my phone. Recently, I was focused on getting a tool from the barn to bring to church. The sudden thought popped into my head while I was loading the car and carrying my cell phone. So, in my haste I (for reasons I cannot understand to this day) I set my cell phone down on the top of the washing machine and then set some mail over the top of it. I hurried to the barn to find the tool I needed. I couldn't find the tool right away because it wasn't where it was supposed to be. I eventually found it ran up to my car with the tool in hand and then suddenly remembered another tool that I may need. Flustered with myself for not thinking about it while I was down in the barn, I threw the first tool into the trunk of the car and ran back down to the barn to get the next thing I needed. Finally, I think I got everything I need (with that little voice in my head telling me there may be something else that I was forgetting.) No matter! I hurriedly hopped into the car and drove off.

About a mile from the house just as I turn onto Hwy 150, I remembered what I forgot. My phone. Ticked at myself for being such an airhead I found a place in busy traffic to turn around. Ten minutes later I'm back home looking for my cell phone. “But where did I put that thing?” By now I was getting pretty frustrated with myself. It was definitely one of those mornings. By now in my head I could hear my wife saying to me, “Why don't you make a list?” And I end the conversation in my head with, “Yea, Yea, I probably should have. It would have saved me a lot of this chaos.”

So, I back-tracked my flustered morning retracing my steps. Yet I just couldn't seem to remember where I put that phone. Worse yet, I couldn't even call it because no one else was home. Thank goodness it buzzed from a text while I was in kitchen looking in places I had tried twice already. I looked in couch cushions and checked the bedroom. Then it buzzed again—thank goodness for texts. Sure enough, it was on the washing machine under some mail. Oh yea! Some distant memory jogged and it all flooded back. Thirty minutes later I was finally on the road again.

Does the Lord forget things? The good news is that He does. He forgets our sins in the forgiveness of the cross. Hebrews 8:12 says, “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” The verse is very much in tune with Jeremiah 31:34 which states, “And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.”

But how do we reconcile this with Matthew 12:36 which says, “People will give an account for every careless word they speak”? The answer is in the faith. Those who are in Christ are a new Creation in Christ—the old is gone and the new has come. Psalm 103:12 reminds us, “as far as the east is the from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Romans 8:1 starts of the chapter making the same point that “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” And verse 34 repeats the thought when it effectively says, “Who's left to condemn us since Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us?” Forgiveness in Christ wipes out our record because Jesus declares us righteous in His grace. We are treated just-as-if-I'd (Justified) never sinned—that's justification in Jesus.

Let's be clear. If God wanted to remember our sins He could. Jesus doesn't have memory problems like Pastor Woods. He chooses to forget our sins because of the cross. When the Heavenly Father looks at us, He sees only the righteousness of Jesus which has been covering us since our Baptisms. Galatians 3:27 says as much, “Anyone who is baptized into Christ Jesus has been clothed with Christ.” The Lord forgets our sins.

On the other hand, however, the Lord always remembers His promises. I can still remember the last time I saw my grandma Woods in Michigan. By then she was well into the later stages of Dementia. She lay in her bed staring at my dad and me blankly. I don't remember her saying anything to us but somewhere deep inside she was trying to connect to us—I'm sure of it. The disease had taken her mind and body away very slowly. It was our long good-bye. The last visit was nothing like the days when she would be made up, beautifully dressed, and always so happy to see us as kids. She wasn't getting up to make us supper or walk with us on the beach or play in the sand.

On that day, back then, I didn't know what to say, or how to approach it. I just missed her and she wasn't even gone yet. I was relieved for her sake when the Lord finally called her home. She could not remember us but somewhere deep down inside a faith was there that had been so strong when she could express herself.

Faith says, the Lord will remember His own. He will not forget us nor let a broken mind prevent His promises from being fulfilled for Grandma Woods. I would only understand this many years later. Jesus is not limited by our limits. In fact, as a friend of mine said, Jesus can speak Alzheimer's, as well as He speaks English. I take comfort in this for my brother as well who has autism. The Lord speaks Autism as well as he speak English too. God's communicating to them on a level of grace much more profound than I am capable of comprehending. There is no where we can be that Jesus cannot be there also—Dementia, Autism, Cancer, or any kind of tribulation this world throws at us. That's what God being with us means. It also means we are with Him. When death comes knocking the resurrection shoves the grave aside and new life comes overrules our grave.

One last thought and encouragement before I wrap this up this morning. You have probably heard me describe how much I love memorizing the Gospel readings for Sunday. I don't have the greatest memory but I find that doing this helps me meditate on God's Word. Memorizing takes me deeper than a quick read. Reading the scriptures can be more like a stone skipping across the water. But memorizing the Gospel feels more like a scuba diver discovering all the beautiful, vibrant colors of the deep, seeing all the amazing fish, and experiencing a place of wonder for the first time. Every time I memorize a passage, I am drawn into it and I see things within those words--so much more meaning. I can't always retain everything I memorize for a Sunday—I'll be honest. But when I return to those passages that I have memorized it feels like meeting an old friend for a visit. Memorizing scriptures is building within me a much deeper appreciation for just what a gift our salvation is.

So, I for one am glad that even though my memory isn't that great all the time God's is perfect. I for one am glad He chooses to forget my sins and remember them no more. Ironically our sins are forgiven and forgotten because the Lord remembers His promises in the cross and in the resurrection. And I hope that you might keep all of this in mind too.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30