

The First Baptist Church, Midland
May 30, 2010 – Memorial Day Weekend
Hebrews 12:1-2; Lamentations 3:21-26

On Remembering...

A Sermon by the Rev. John P. Dick
Theme: Memorial Day

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...” (Hebrews 12: 1-2a) I love this passage of scripture because it reminds me that we are not in this world alone. We’re surrounded, aren’t we, by those relationships which have helped to form us... which call us forward in the spirit of Christ. Now it’s true... the writer of Hebrews is talking about the giants of the faith who walked long before us, but we know the list also includes those wonderful folks with whom we have literally walked who have impacted us for good. These along with those ancient biblical giants are the wonderful witnesses with which we surround ourselves. And it is the memory of these relationships that carries us forward.

Now I wonder... what better time might there be to recall these associations than the present? Memorial Day... it’s a very special time, isn’t it, because it does two things. It marks the beginning of the summer vacation season, and that’s exciting. But it also provides an excellent opportunity to step back and remember... though admittedly this is sometimes easier said than done.

We all know that Albert Einstein was a genius, right? But did you know he was also given to frequent lapses of memory? One day after he had moved to his home at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, the telephone rang in the office of the Dean of the Graduate School. The voice at the other end inquired: "May I speak with Dr. Einstein, please?"

Advised that he wasn’t in, the voice continued: "perhaps then you will tell me where Dr. Einstein lives." The secretary replied that she couldn’t do this, since Dr. Einstein wished to have his privacy respected. Then suddenly the voice on the telephone dropped to a near whisper: "Please do not tell anybody," the caller said, "but I am Dr. Einstein. I am on my way home, and have forgotten where my house is!"

We chuckle at Albert Einstein’s foibles, but I imagine if we were honest we could all share similar moments of embarrassment for sometimes our recollection can be fleeting. However, when those special memories that warm us all over... those memories that invite us to recall the formative times in our lives when we’ve been surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses... the folks who have impacted us for good... we suddenly realize what a wonderful gift those cherished memories can be. Just recently that happened to David. In fact, it was last week.

Now I know I often tease David, but this time I’m very serious. Last weekend, as some of you know, David had the privilege of returning to a church he and I served together many

years ago. Those dear folks had invited him back to preach for their Pentecost celebration. On Monday morning he came into my office with a big grin on his face. It had obviously been a good experience. And as he shared a bit about his time away, I noticed he was holding a picture.

Finally he asked me, *Who are these people? Do you recognize them?* Well, I recognized the guy in the middle. It was David... with a clerical robe. I have to admit that threw me off for a moment. But he was with a young couple whom he had obviously married and wondered if I recognized them. I didn't have a clue. When I gave up, he told me who they were. Turns out I did indeed know the young lady... when she was a little girl. But my how she has grown. And that picture was taken about a dozen years ago.

Well guess what... this young couple showed up at the Pentecost service in Wyoming, OH, with the gift of this picture in hand. It was a wonderful reminder for David of a great chapter in his life. And that experience led us to do some reminiscing about those days which now seem so long ago.

It's fun to go back and revisit old memories, isn't it? It helps a person to rekindle those times that have helped to give formation to who we are. Sometimes the experiences we remember are pleasant and sometimes they are painful. Especially on Memorial Day when we take time to remember those who have served our country well and who lost their lives in the process, we feel sad. Yet either way, so many of our memories are unforgettable. You know what I'm talking about, don't you...

There is a book in the Bible which speaks to what I'm attempting to describe. It's called Lamentations and it is considered to be from the mind of a prophet named Jeremiah. Perhaps you remember Jeremiah?

He was the prophet who had the sorry experience of presiding over the city of Jerusalem at the time it was being destroyed back in 587 B.C. It was his lot to warn those folks that there were dark clouds upon the horizon... clouds that were going to extinguish the light of God's favor upon their nation because of their inappropriate behavior. They laughed at him and ignored his Godly premonitions, and as a result they were not up to the onslaught of the Babylonian armies.

Hence, many were carried away into bondage... forced to abandon the city of their dreams. Their faith which had been centered in the temple was now under serious assault and they felt abandoned by their God.

Now it happens that Jeremiah was one of the people taken forcefully from his home. And it was growing out of these memories that he eventually reflected upon the experience and recorded his memories for posterity.

Most were not very good. He grieved the loss of his beloved Jerusalem. **"How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!"** he wrote. **"How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has**

become a vassal.” (Lamentations 1:1) That’s how his recollections began. And much of what he wrote spiraled down from there speaking to both personal and community loss.

But then it happens. Right in the middle of his lamentation, Jeremiah suddenly remembers. Right after he talks about forgetting what happiness is and complains about the heaviness of his soul he says: **But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”** (Lamentations 3:21-23)

Such is the power of memory. It has the ability to bring tears to our eyes and warmth to our souls? And Jeremiah doesn’t stand alone in illustrating this point. Read through the Bible from beginning to end and you’ll find it is filled with memories. People remembered their experiences growing out of those wilderness places in their lives and passed them along from person to person and from generation to generation. And to this day we remember... we remember Abraham because of the way he took his family and moved them, with no questions asked. We remember Moses because of the way he took his people and delivered them against all odds. We remember Joshua because of the way he crossed the river and offered his people hope. We remember David because of the way he lifted the day of the monarchy to new heights. We remember Isaiah because of the way he befriended God’s people in an effort to warn them of things to come. We remember Jeremiah because of the way he openly shared his broken heart. But most of all, we remember Jesus because of the way he befriended countless people who walked his way bringing them to new depths of spiritual understanding.

You see, memories... especially those which find God at the center... are inspired and without a doubt they have the power to shape us. So as we come to the end of this simple Memorial Day reflection about the importance of memory, I have a couple questions for you to ponder. Who or what are you going to remember tomorrow? Where are you going to allow God to take you in your thoughts? How are you going to process the good as well as the painful recollections?

Wherever your thoughts take you this Memorial Day, consider this... “Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose.” (From the television show *The Wonder Years*)

You know, in reflecting back upon that earlier time in our lives, I think I can safely speak for David as well as myself when saying we’ll never walk away completely from that little church in Wyoming, OH. It’s a part of us because that great cloud of witnesses continues to surround us. In the same way, we’ll never be separated from this glorious church family because you are a part of us and our relationships run deep. And it’s this reality in all of our lives that helps us to embrace today’s promise. It’s true, you know. *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is our Lord’s faithfulness...* And don’t you forget it! ☺ Amen and AMEN!