

Memory and Hope

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:1

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 8-B

June 7, 2015

Certainly one message that comes across to us in each of the appointed Scripture lessons today is that our God not only provides for our physical needs, but for our spiritual needs also, so that as we make our way through life, we can continue to say with the Apostle Paul: *"So we do not lose heart!"* (2 Corinthian 4:16) Or as the King James Version translates this verse, *"We do not grow faint!"* And the New Living Translation says: *"This is why we never give up!"*

Well obviously, the Old Testament lesson from Genesis 3:8-15 contains both troubling and comforting words! Of all the **abundant fruit that was no doubt hanging on countless fruit trees** all around them, perfectly ripe and ready to be picked and eaten, God had specifically commanded "the man" as Adam is referred to here, and "the woman" as Eve is referred to here, not to eat of that one tree at the center of the Garden of Eden, designated by God to be: *"The tree of the knowledge of good and evil"* (Genesis 2:17)!

And people have often wondered: "Why in the world would the good Lord do that?" After all, as soon as you tell someone else you can't do something, it is always as if you are putting the idea in their head to do it. People want that which they cannot have. Or as someone else has aptly put it: **"Forbidden fruit has produced many a jam!"** But let's remember that at this point our first parents, who were created without sin and in the image of God, **still did not have all of those evil inclinations in their hearts and minds** that we sinners are born with today!. **BUT OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT BY GOD MAKING THIS PRONOUNCEMENT HE WAS DRAWING THE PROVERBIAL LINE IN THE SAND.** God was saying, *"As long as you remember that I am God and that you are man, as long as you remember that I am the Creator and you are the creature, everything will be fine.*

But you know how Satan works don't you! He appears in the guise of serpent and speaking to the woman first, he casts doubt on the Word of God. The serpent who was craftier than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made came to the woman, tempting her to do that which God had forbidden his human creatures to do; tempting her by casting doubt for her on God's Word. *"Did God really say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden!"?* (Genesis 3:1)

And the woman, in good **catechetical** fashion, came forward with the correct answer immediately: *"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you*

touch it, lest you shall die!” But the serpent is persistent and does not give up. He continues to cast doubt on God’s Word, by saying: *“You shall not die! For God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opening and you will be like God, knowing good and evil!”*

So when the woman saw that it was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths!” (Genesis 3:1-8)

The results of their disobedience were absolutely devastating! Rather than their continuing to enjoy **complete fellowship with the LORD God** who had created them, as they had enjoyed up until this time, they were now completely alienated from him! Rather than their **knowing only good and nothing as evil** in this world, as they had, up to this time, **their innocence was now completely shattered**. Rather than their being filled only with great love for God the Father, they were now primarily fearful of God, whom they sensed was no longer their Father.

But please note: Our God in his grace did not simply abandon them and leave them to live with the unfortunate consequences of their disobedience, saying to the woman: *“Because you have done this, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing”* (Genesis 3:16). And to the man he also said, *“Because you have done this cursed is the ground because of you! By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground!”* (Genesis 3:17-19).

But even on this most unfortunate day, God does not want his human creatures to lose heart. God does not want Adam and Eve to grow faint. God does not want them to give up on the hope of their living out their lives out their lives and discover a meaningful existence for themselves in this world!

When God pronounces judgment upon the serpent, theologians have always seen verse 15 as the first promise given in the Bible of a Savior who would come to rescue us from sin and death and the grave. God says to the serpent: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he (the Savior) will bruise your head, and you (Satan) will bruise his heel!”* (Genesis 3:15)

Yes, Satan may have thought that he was doing some damage to the Son of God in his crucifixion upon the cross, but not nearly the damage that the Son of God would do to Satan; because this action wasn’t really Satan’s action, but God’s! This was God reconciling us to himself and defeating death and the grave, restoring unto

those whom God has now made to be his children again, the gift of everlasting life, and once again---the faith that God was with them, not to punish them but to save them.

Brothers and sisters, have you ever stopped to think that there are some things that the Bible tells us we do well to remember, and there are other things that the Bible tells us, we do well to forget?

Just before the children of Israel were crossing over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses told them to never to forget the saving events by which the LORD God Almighty had delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians, freeing them from bondage, and guiding and leading them to the Promised Land, saying: *"You shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart; whether you would keep his commandments or not. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you!*

Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you to do good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth! You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods, you shall surely perish" (Deuteronomy 8:2-19)!

And yet isn't this the most basic temptation that still comes before every one of us today? The temptation is always there to forget about God and his Word; to ignore his teachings and his commandments, and in doing so, to become our own god ourselves!?!

On the other hand there are some things that the Bible tells us we do well to forget, by not dwelling on a painful past, but not dwelling constantly on sins in the past that we have committed or on sins that other people have committed against us! After all wouldn't

this be the very hallmark of the New Covenant that God would come to form with us as the Prophet Jeremiah told us about it, “Behold the days are coming says the Lord... “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more!” (Jeremiah 31:34)

We do well to remember the sacrifice of Christ for us on the cross, every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper: “Do this often, in remembrance of me!”

St. Paul tells the Philippians, *“One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!” (Philippians 3:13-14).*

It certainly would have been easy for Jesus, in his humanity, to lose heart, to grow faint, and to give up! For after all, he was repeatedly rejected by many of his own countrymen. The Apostle John tells us, *“He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not!” (John 1:10-11)*

Why just take a close look at our Gospel lesson today! Here the Son of God has come into our world as one of us to become the Redeemer and the Savior of our lost souls, and how do those religious authorities who come down from Jerusalem respond to our Lord and to his teaching and healing ministry? They accuse Jesus of being possessed by the devil, even going so far as to say: “By the prince of demons, he cast out demons!”

Then Jesus proceeds to tell them how absolutely ludicrous just this false accusation being leveled against him no doubt was! *“A kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand!” (Mark 3:23).* And it was no one less than Abraham Lincoln himself who quoted Jesus one day very boldly during those horrendous days of the Civil War when he said, *“If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand!” (Mark 3:24)*

St. Paul certainly had much opposition to his ministry, and yet he seems to be absolutely indomitable, at times, writing to the church at Rome one day: *“If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, now will he not also with him graciously give us all things? We are more than conquerors through Christ. I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things past nor present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans 8:31-32, 37-39)*

Brother and sisters, where is the STAYING POWER for our being not only able to cope successfully with the great pain and difficulty that we ourselves will experience in life, but to also believe that we will one day emerge from as conquerors one day? That staying power is to be found in our own deep personal belief in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the dead!

Paul suffered so much persecution throughout his ministry. He certainly must have been tempted, at times, I would think, to throw in the towel, to call it quits, to resign from his post, and to find a nice little place for himself along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but there is nothing ever to suggest to us in the New Testament that this is what he did! Instead, quite the opposite is what we read in God's Book—the Bible!

In this same chapter, Paul writes of the great resiliency he has received through the Gospel and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that is now with him! Paul writes, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh!"* (2 Cor. 4:8-11)

Memory and hope—these are two important facets of our Christian lives, brothers and sisters! The power God makes available to us to successfully transition through all the many transitions we have to transition through in this life is Christ himself, and our strong, personal belief that he truly is risen from the dead! And that through our faith in Jesus Christ, we know that the best is always yet to come! This is why we do not lose heart, this is why we do not faint, this is how we personally embrace that "never say die" attitude!

It's true that we are all dying. Isaiah says in 40:6, and Peter quotes him in I Peter 1:24, *"All flesh is like grass, and the glory of man is like the flower of grass! The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the LORD endures forever!"* (Isaiah 40:6, I Peter 1:24) But we also need the faith to say, *"For as in Adam all die, even so through Christ shall all be made alive again; with Christ being but the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep!"* (I Corinthians 15:22)

Today we have in our bulletin a special insert with the name of our members whom we know are graduating now from high school and college, some are receiving advanced degrees! Some are leaving home for the first time, in a way with much greater implications, when they left home 12 or 13 years before this to attend kindergarten and the first grade.

People transition from being in college to taking their first job, from being a single person to becoming a married person, and some have to transition to becoming a single person again through the death of spouse or divorce. We have to transition from being people in the work force with fulltime jobs, to people who are now retired, re-directed in life, as is the more politically correct way of saying it. We have to leave our homes, maybe, and are forced to live elsewhere. Some married people are actually being forced to live alone because of the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes we forced to transition from the healthy and vivacious person we have always been in the past, to a person now who is forced to battle illness and disease.

But there is something about firmly believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, about our possessing his risen life within us already now, when we are really CAPTURED by it that moves us from fear, worry, and panic, to hope, joy and courage. It places me on a peak of trust and contentment that lets me rise above a valley of anxiety. The everyday ups and downs of life have taken on a levelness as they are interpreted always by memory and hope.

Please let me close by reading those words from St. Paul in our epistle lesson again today: *"We know that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by*

day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal! For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!" (2 Corinthians 4:14—5:1) Amen