

“Remembering in Times of Crisis”

Lamentations 1:1-6; II Timothy 1:1-14

World Communion Sunday, October 6, 2013

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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A seminarian in their first student appointment stood up and said to the congregation, *“Do any of you know what I’m going to say today?”* They shook their heads “no” and the student said, *“Well, neither do I”* and sat down.

There was considerable murmuring but the service went on. After the service the chair of Staff-Parish said, *“Reverend, you really need to have a message next week.”*

The next week the seminarian rose and asked the same question, *“Do any of you know what I’m going to say today?”* Once burnt, twice shy, the congregation nodded “yes.” The seminarian said, *“Well, if that’s true there’s no use in me saying it”* and sat down.

By now trouble is brewing. The Staff-Parish chair took the young miscreant aside and said, *“You’d really better have a message next week or you’re going to have trouble in this place.”*

Next Sunday came and, to everyone’s surprise, the seminarian AGAIN began with *“Do any of you know what I’m going to say today?”* Caught off guard, some worshippers nodded “yes” while others shook their heads “no.” *“Good,”* said the student preacher. *“Those of you who know what I’m going to say please tell those who do not know.”*

Remembering the good news we already know and telling those who may not is the simple point of this message *“Remembering in Times of Crisis.”* Remembering is at the heart of life and religious community. We know, perhaps first-hand, of the sadness of memory loss through dementia or Alzheimer’s disease. Most of the great world religions have, as an essential component, remembrance. On this World Communion Sunday we will recall the highest moment in the most central act of the Christian faith when the celebrant remembers the words of Jesus, the Words of Institution, at the Lord’s Supper:

“On the night in which he gave himself up for us, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to You, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said: ‘Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”

The ability to remember is particularly powerful in times of crisis. Today’s readings reflect this. The first, Lamentations, are poems written after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Jewish leaders in 587 B.C. I spoke of this last week as we reflected on the prophet Haggai’s call to rebuild the temple. But here, in this reading, they are decades away from such a positive outcome. The Jewish people can only lament their grief and the destruction of their holy city, Jerusalem.

This destruction was unimaginable. In our lifetime the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attacks on the Pentagon and the thwarted attack on the Capital on September 11, 2001 is as close as we might get. 200 years ago it was the burning of Washington, D.C. in the War of 1812. Jews regarding Jerusalem, Zion, as inviolate: in other words, they believed God so protected them that, whatever else might happen, Jerusalem would never be conquered. But in today’s reading it has been. Not only the world as they knew it, but God and God’s protection as they understood it, had changed forever.

This is how it is with grief, which is not just bereavement (the loss experienced at the death of a loved one) but **any** experience of loss. One of the characteristics of this grief, particularly when we are in crisis as a result of it, is the sensation of being in a pit or box with no way out; or being in a difficult situation that will never end. One wit has said that this kind of grief is the realization that the light at the end of the tunnel is an on-coming train.

A step toward healing, then, is to remember times before the crisis. This remembering allows us to acknowledge that, although the loss is very real, it is only a part and not the totality of life.

Remembering who we are and what we believe steadies us in times of crisis. My friend who works with older adults calls it “remembrance

therapy:” telling stories from the past to bring healing to the present. That leads to the second reading from II Timothy and what its writer, traditionally believed to be the Apostle Paul, is saying to Timothy. Paul remembers Timothy’s tears and sincere faith, a recollection that now steadies him through his present crisis of being jailed for his faith.

Paul also remembers Timothy’s family: *“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.”* When I was getting old enough to get into serious trouble, my parents would often say as I left to go somewhere: *“Remember who you are.”* That phrase was shorthand for *“Remember that you are a Bodt, whose family name goes back 175 years and seven generations in Harford County, Maryland; that you are the son of a father who is a criminal investigator and a nurse, both of whom are well-known in your community and who have a good reputation; and if you do anything to bring shame or embarrassment to that you are in BIG—I mean REALLY big—trouble!”*

Part of our national moral confusion is that we do not remember who we are. I am not just referring to the surge of YouTube nonsense videos that spotlight the inane for the amusement of the bored; or the desire for sensationalism that has left a biker paralyzed and the family the swarm of bikers appeared to threaten forever scarred. I am referring to us; to you and me, who sometimes forget who WE are under God. That you are here today is a testimony to your yearning to remember. Consistency is key and I urge you to keep coming even in tough times.

So what are we doing for the children and youth who are setting the foundation now for a lifetime of faith; and for those who are not here but who once were? The answer to these questions will, I hope, be part of our strategic plan, so two quick comments. We do many things for youth, but one I insist on to help us remember who we are is Confirmation memory work. I believe the Lord’s Prayer, the 23rd Psalm, John 3:16-17, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed (or another creed) are things every Christian should know. Knowing these gives our youth a resource, especially in times of crisis.

For those who were once here but now are not, I began in the summer to send letters inviting our members back to their own church. The first batch was 15 families; and I have another 20 whose letters will go within two weeks. The purpose of these letters is to invite our members back to their spiritual home.

In that sense, this message ends as it begins: those who know the sacrificial love of God telling those who do not. In her book *In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart*, Roberta Bondi tells of her struggle to grasp and believe in God's steadfast love for her. A friend challenged her to consider the possibility that God loves us *"with exactly the same delight as mothers love their children."* Bondi remembered her own delight in her daughter, and the refrigerator door where her child's paintings hung. The drips and mistakes that marked them were irrelevant. Bondi wrote: *"Instead, I was filled up to the top with pride and happiness and pleasure in my child...what if, when God looks at God's children and what we do, God is struck first, not by all the awful things we do, but by God's love for us? What if God sees very well the terrible, hateful messes we make, but says instead, 'Yes, I see it all, but how much more important it is that they are so dear to me.'"*

Remember who you are. Remember whose you are: a child of the God who never forgets you. Remember your faith in times of crisis. Amen.