

Remembering

Deuteronomy 6:20-25; Isaiah 46:8-10; Ephesians 1:15-23

All Saints/Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, (Nov. 6) 2022

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Sometime ago I read a *New Yorker* (Dec. 2, 2007) article by Atul Gawande, a Harvard surgeon and writer about his book *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*. He wrote, “Our great struggle in medicine these days is not just with ignorance and uncertainty. It’s also with complexity: how much you have to make sure you have in your head and think about. There are a thousand ways things can go wrong.”

What he learned is a deceptively simple idea: in a complex world, with so many multifaceted tasks before us, you need to make a list. And the purpose of making a list is so we will not forget.

The author points out that as we age, we tend to lose our short-term memory first. We eventually also tend to lose sequential memory, therefore the daily making of a “things to do” list is all the more important as we age.

I’m living proof about aging and losing short-term memory. I walk into a room and can’t remember why I went in there. I’m in my car and drive into the church parking lot, realizing I forgot that I left the house to drive to the hospital to see someone. Many of you know what I’m talking about. (Say “amen!”) Our world is complex and confusing and I’m at the place in life, where it seems that I have multiple things going on all at the same time. My short-term memory is

overwhelmed, so more and more I'm making lists. And the purpose of making a list is to remember.

The people of the Bible were built on memory. The people told and retold stories and they did so, so they would remember.

Our reading from Deuteronomy says that when your children come and ask, "Why do we have to live this way? Why do we eat only certain foods while the other kids don't? Why do we care for the immigrant, widows, and orphans? Why do we do this and not that?" You remind them and tell them that we were slaves in Egypt and God delivered us, and you tell them these old stories over and over again.

Part of the role of the prophets in the Old Testament, like our reading from Isaiah this morning, was to remind the people of what they had forgotten. They no longer remembered they were God's people. They had forgotten they were slaves in Egypt and that God delivered them to become a new people, so Isaiah reminds them.

In the New Testament it is no different. The Gospels likely began in oral form but soon each oral narrative was written down because we did not want to forget the most important things. It is essential to remember who God is, who we are, and who we hope to God we will become (Marney). It is essential to remember that in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus, God is bringing about a new creation and we have joined with it.

The Apostle Paul wrote to his churches remembering them in his prayers. And referring to them as "saints" (Eph. 1:15, 18). For Paul and for the people who made up the churches, "saints" did not mean some sort of special-holier-than-thou

kind of person. It did mean the congregation of people who knew they were set apart to live differently than the rest of the world because of what Jesus Christ had done and was doing in their lives and in the world.

Over time, the church realized that we needed to remember the stories of Jesus followers, the saints, and tell these stories over and over again to help us remember who we are to be and remember what's important. Stories of the saints help us remember.

Theologian James McClendon, who spoke here years ago, wrote, *In or near the community there appear from time to time singular or striking lives, the lives of persons who embody the convictions of the community, but in new ways; who share the vision of the community, but with new scope or power; who exhibit the style of the community, but with significant differences. It is plain that the example of these lives may serve to disclose and perhaps to correct or enlarge the community's moral vision, at the same time arousing impotent wills within the community to a better fulfillment of the vision already acquired.* (from *Biography as Theology*).

On this All Saints Sunday we remember. We remember those who have gone before us, and we remember those “singular or striking lives” who inspire us and encourage us and keep us on the Way of Jesus. They show us what's important.

We remember Michael Sattler, a monk who left the monastery and was baptized in 1526 in southern Germany during the early days of the Reformation to become one of the leaders of the Anabaptist movement. Central to those early (small “b”) baptists, was Jesus' teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, including

the practice of non-violence, suffering servanthood, forgiveness, the love of God, the love of neighbors, and the love of enemies.

He was arrested, horribly tortured, and executed. The plaque where he was burned at the stake reads: “The Baptist Michael Sattler was executed by burning after severe torture on 20 May 1527... He died as a true witness of Jesus Christ. His wife Margaretha and other members of the congregation were drowned and burned. They acted for the baptism of those who want to follow Christ, for an independent congregation of the faithful, for the peaceful message of the Sermon on the Mount.”

And we remember Roger Williams. Classmate and friend of the poet John Milton when they were at Cambridge together, Williams went on to be the founder of the first baptist congregation in America in 1638 in Providence, Rhode Island, as well as the founder of Rhode Island colony itself, calling it a “commonwealth” meaning that it would be a place for the good of all people, including outcasts and refugees from other places, where there was religious freedom to practice faith or even not practice faith, and that indigenous Americans should be treated with dignity and respect and that treaties should be negotiated with them and honored. He said that it was sinful that many Christians believe they have a right to indigenous lands.

We remember Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi, who was arrested and beaten and tortured in jail for attempting to register to vote. Yet, she did not give up. In 1964, at church in Indianola, MS, she stood and testified, “You can pray until you faint, but if you don’t get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap.” Then she led the congregation to go down and register to vote.

People like Fannie Lou Hamer and John Lewis and so many others, were beaten, and tortured, and many were killed just trying to vote. On this All Saints Sunday and on Tuesday down at the voting booths, we remember them. We honor them when we vote.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, John Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Will Campbell, and others led boycotts, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, marches, voted, organized, and went to jail – walking into the jaws of hatred armed with nothing but the non-violent love of Jesus. The same non-violent love embodied by Michael Sattler and Roger Williams.

Historian Taylor Branch has written, “Nonviolence is an orphan among democratic ideas. It has nearly vanished from public discourse even though the most basic element of free government – the vote – has no other meaning. **Every ballot is a piece of nonviolence**, signifying hard-won consent to raise politics above firepower and bloody conquest” (from the Introduction to *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years 1965-1968*).

This morning, I’m aware that many of you have a lot of anxiety about this week’s election, as well as the atmosphere of our state and country. But on this All Saints morning we want to remember. Remember that this is not the first time we have been in a bad place, and this is not the first time we have tried to figure what it means to be faithful to Christ in tough situations.

I want you to remember that the simple act of voting is a witness and a prayer that creative change is possible, and that change – real change – is nonviolent. In our day where guns and violence, intimidation and coercion, bigotry, racism, and White Nationalism are growing in popularity, we remember that we are called to another way. The Way of Jesus is nonviolent and respects the

dignity of all people to have a voice because all people are created by a loving God.

No matter which way this election goes, or future elections, we remember who we are. Like those who have gone before us, we follow Jesus and central to all we believe and do is the Sermon on the Mount which is the Way of Jesus. We keep on keeping on, no matter what.

And remember this: our ability to be creative change agents is not because political power is our goal. We keep our eyes on the prize of being followers of Jesus. Creative change comes from that. We stick together and keep our eyes on the prize and hold on.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the saints of another struggling little congregation. This one was in Phillipi. They felt overwhelmed. But Paul said remember that God in Christ Jesus was a servant – and so are we. He said, “Keep your mind focused on this. ... One thing we hold onto: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, we press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us think this way... Let us hold on to what we have attained” (Philippians 3:13-16).

So we hold on...

[Vic Cole sings “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize”]

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.