

“Remembering”

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Exodus 12:14-17

A couple in their 80's were having problems remembering things, so they decided to go to the doctor for a checkup. The doctor tells them that they are physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember. Later that night, while watching TV, the husband gets up from his chair. His wife asks, "Where are you going?" "To the kitchen for a drink," he replies. She asks, "Will you get me a piece of cake?" The husband says, "Sure." She gently reminds him, "Don't you think you should write it down so you don't forget it?" He says, "No, I can certainly remember that!" Then the woman says, "Well, I'd like some strawberries on top. You'd better write it down because I know you'll forget it." The man replies, "I can remember that! You want some cake with strawberries." She adds, "I'd like whipped cream on top. Now I'm certain you're gonna forget that, so you'd better write it down o.k." Irritated, he says, "I don't need to write it down woman! I can remember that! Cake with strawberries! And whipped cream!" He then grumbles all the way into the kitchen. After about 30 minutes the husband returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment and says, "Where's my toast?"

Remembering is important!

A few years ago I participated in the annual Holocaust Remembrance Program, sponsored by the Jewish Community Center. We met at O'hav Zedeck synagogue. The speaker was Professor Deborah Lipstadt, a holocaust scholar and defendant in a trial in England several years ago that caught worldwide attention. She was being sued by a holocaust denier, David Irving due to her mentioning him in one of her books. The justice system in England reverses the burden of proof onto the defendant. She had to prove her case. She did so, and did it well. The judge actually read in full his findings that David Irving was indeed a holocaust denier, twisting and controlling history.

My friends the past matters. Correctly remembering the past is paramount! People, events, dates, context – all matter!

According to professor Jeffrey Blustein, in his book The Moral Demands Memory, memory plays a significant role in human relations. He declares, "...Remembrance is an indispensable ingredient of a good life, and a necessary condition of civic health."

There is little debate, that memory for us (Americans) "has acquired heightened importance and visibility in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001." Ground zero will be a lasting memorial! What actually happened on that horrendous day must be remembered!

Not craziness that our government did it, or that the Jews did it! Correct memory, remembering is not only necessary for society, but necessary morally!

Professor Blustein declares, "Societies have various means at their disposal to ensure that their members do not forget important historical events, and to shape how those events will be remembered. Erecting monuments, constructing museums, and holding regular commemorative ceremonies are ways of managing collective memory." These are imperatives to remembering, not only for ourselves, but for our children, and their children.

I remember back in the mid-1980's, driving from Greenville, Illinois to St. Louis, with a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville. We were traveling the 50 miles to visit a church member in the hospital. As we were on the road, we were getting to know each other. I was the new minister - that Eastern Liberal (as I later heard - with a smile and a wink - by a new friend). Funny - I never thought of myself as an Easterner - what with coming from Western PA.

But as we were visiting in the car, Jack - a man in his mid 70's and a WWII veteran - shared this insight – I've never forgotten it. We were talking about contemporary life - its challenges, its changes. Jack remarked, not in a pejorative way, but almost on a philosophical level, maybe psychological level – “*Unless a person has lived through the Great Depression and WWII - he will not truly understand where we are today, and respond accordingly*”

Now, he was not taking a swipe at this 35 year old youngster. But he was concerned with - where we, Americans were headed - and that too many had not lived through those defining times - of economic collapse and the horror of a World War. He was remembering and informing the present.

Now - probably his statement was an exaggeration, but perhaps not much of one. Jack was concerned that we were not learning from our past. He and others had direct memories of those turbulent times. They remembered - and from that memory were very careful about debt, savings, national and global security.

He seemed to be saying that there are indeed values from the past that deserve and need to be embraced today, in the here and now.

This event came to mind recently, because we are once again honoring *Memorial Day*.

Memorial Day - a specific time to remember something specifically. We honor, pay our respect for those men and women who sacrificed their lives for the cause of freedom and security.

I remember standing at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. - searching for the name of Paul Stasko. I found it, and did what so many others were doing - I reached out and ran my fingers over his name. I remember him. I remember standing at his coffin in Butler, PA - looking at this young Marine. A friend's older brother. I was in High School. We still struggle with defining - remembering this “war”.

But let's go to what has been called the “Good War,” WWII. “Good” because of its unquestioned - purpose - I suppose. Of course there is Korea. There are others. There is today! Tom Brokaw has written tributes to the generation of men and women who came of age in the Great Depression and the Second World War.

The popularity, the positive response of his book surprised Mr. Brokaw. He writes, “Baby boomers who were distanced from the values of their parents during the 60's, now have a new appreciation for the sacrifices and deprivations of their mothers and fathers.”

The values of remembrance.

Former Senator Bob Dole, and wounded veteran - gave a speech in 1997 (Before the WWII Memorial was opened) on his concern and hope that we would erect a National Monument in memory of those who served the cause of freedom in WWII. He said, “We owe them a debt.” He also declared, “It is important that we remember the voices and deeds of those young men and women who liberated whole continents from tyranny and who willingly died for a future they would never see.”

Remembering is a must, a necessity - for a society, a people! Why do you think our Jewish friends are keeping the Holocaust before the world's eyes? So we never forget! Humanity's memory is all too short! Read history - and see

what I mean.

Remember Santayana's famous dictum – “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

And so - we must remember!

As I visited my uncle Bob in the Butler hospital sometime ago - I remembered he spent 2 years in a prisoner of war camp - somewhere in the Pacific theater.

Several years ago, as I visited Cap Walters in the hospital on Memorial Day - I remembered he was on board his ship at Pearl Harbor - on Dec. 7, 1941.

You have your memories - specific, personal remembrances of loved ones, friends, your own.

And underlying these memories - are values of worth, freedom, hope, commitment, and so much more!

Such remembrances are not morbid. By no means!

There is value in remembering!

There is learning in remembering!

We set up memorials to remember - to elicit an intellectual and emotional response!

Memorials - of all kinds. We human beings have been in the memorial business for thousands of years! We have learned memorials - bestow values, as we remember.

In ancient Israel they knew the importance of memorials, of remembering. In Exodus they are told to remember, memorialize.

In Joshua - the people of Israel - set up memorials to quicken their memories - to pull them together as a people - to celebrate their values. Whether the memorials were stones or torah - they were imbued with values.

“Take these stones and build a memorial for this special, worthy event - when our children see these stones - share the story of who we are.” Memorials!

A professor specializing in this field - states - the new Memorials - Oklahoma Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Holocaust Memorial, WWII, are “places of civic transformation,” places “where one cries out in anguish against the event, to keep it in living memory.” He further states, “Memorials are a product of who we are right now. We are a people negotiating our identities - individual, corporate, ethnic and more.”

During the Summer - take some time - visit national, state, private memorials. Take your children, grandchildren.

Stand there and reflect. What are those values that define your life and the life of your society?

The Memorial Day weekend, take time to Remember.

Amen.