

“Yesterday”

Isaiah 64:4-8; Ecc 3:1-14;
Gal 1:11-24; Luke 1:46-55

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Yesterday. Yesterday, all my troubles seemed to go away... seemed so far away. All right, you guys probably know this better than I do. It's always been amazing to me that I never seem to remember song lyrics. That song, *Yesterday*, ends that first verse with “Oh, I believe in yesterday.” The reason that song came to mind is that as I was thinking about moving into this new phase of our series this fall where we begin to think about time. Last week we thought about how we live, in some way, in God's kingdom. Jesus said the kingdom of God is among us. So we are now thinking about the kind of place we live. One of the things I was thinking about in relationship to that is time. One thought was about yesterday, about the past. I had this series planned back in August, with today's sermon focusing on remembering the past, and then realized that we were going to acknowledge All Saints' Day today. Sometimes it feels like Somebody Else is in charge.

As I was thinking about how we remember, when we think about yesterday, we think about this thing called time. Most of the time I don't want to think too much about time. These days I try not to think about it, but when I do it's always amazing to me. Physicists tell us we live in this space-time continuum, but there's something different about time to me. In space I can go forward, backward, sideways and even up a little bit if I want to. But time—we measure it with clocks. Don't you wish sometimes that you could just turn time back? I know I do sometimes. Sometimes it's pretty simple. There was that one time when I jumped off our rock wall and as I was hitting the ground, because I was spraining my ankle, I thought, “Why did I do that?” If I could just go back a minute or two, but I can't.

What would it be like if we could turn back the hands of time? Sometimes I think I would never move forward. I would always be going back trying to change things to make them better than last time or I might have one experience that I would keep doing over and over again. And think about how complicated it would get if we all tried to do those kinds of things. Life is complicated enough.

So in some senses, it feels like time has a grace to it. We don't have to go back. We don't have to try over and over again. We move on, and we have grace to do that. So there's a certain grace in time going forward and I need to learn how to gracefully do that. Sometimes I see the grace in that we don't have any way to go back. We talk about having a time capsule that would take us back so we could change things, and there are all kinds of shows about how that messes things up. So the only way we really have to go back, the only time capsule we have, is our memories. We remember. We think back to what was before us.

Time is an incredible thing that we live within, and that wonderful, beautiful passage from Ecclesiastes seems to say that God gave it to us. We get to experience the seasons and everything under heaven. And then we remember.

I don't know about you, but I don't feel like that memory is always quite accurate. Sometimes I don't really quite trust all the things I remember, or I just wish I could remember more than I seem to. So how do we remember?

For those of us who have been participating in Our Call to Care series, this present reading is looking at people with different economic statuses, but in that reading, Ruby Payne talks about one way we remember. One of the central ways human beings seem to remember things is with story. We tell stories of our lives because it's a way of remembering. When we light these candles and we think back on people in our lives, we might think of the stories that go with that because they are part of the way of remembering.

I sometimes feel like I'm beginning to realize how important story is, but I've always struggled a little bit with that. I think I grew up in a family that was a little more Joe Friday-ish—just the facts. Story? That's something you take to your teacher in school to try to get out of something. It's just a story. Yet, I'm beginning to realize that it is in the story that the facts come to light. We experience something and when we look back and tell the story, we give it something new because we have a new perspective. We can begin to say this is why that thing happened, or this is what came out of that. Or we notice something that is humorous that we didn't think was humorous at the time. We'll see a meaning in the story of our lives that we didn't experience at the time but we know it now. It's more than facts. Somehow it gets imbued with meaning, purpose.

When Paul is trying to tell the Galatians about himself, he tells them a story, really. "Remember who I was? Remember how bad I was, then I encountered Christ and he changed the plot of my story. He changed my narrative. He changed my life." He tells it as a story because he needs to tell about who he was and who he has become and how the message was revealed to him. When he's going back and looking at that story, he's telling more than just the facts. There are some facts in it, but what he's imbuing those facts with is the meaning, the reason, the purpose, the reason why that particular thing happened. In his remembering he brings to the people he's writing to information about who he is. We often tell stories of our lives because they tell about who we are. They help us remember who we are.

So the stories help us remember who we are. Isn't that what scripture is about in a lot of ways? It's remembering who we are and remembering who God is. The stories of scripture are a way of helping us remember the people who have gone before us, all the saints. They are a way of helping us remember the character of who God is. When we read this beautiful Magnificat that Mary says in today's Luke passage, she's remembering the context. She has just encountered the angel and in a way what she's doing is saying, "I can put this encounter in context because I remember who God is. I remember the character of God who lifts up the lowly and cares about the oppressed

and thwarts the ways of the rulers.” Remembering from generation to generation, she says, starting with Abraham. The remembering in that respect is a gift that allows us to put our faith in context and remember the character of God and begin to think about who God is. Out of that remembering, we also remember the promises of God, so Mary is also remembering the context of that promise. God delivered the Israelites and is in the process of delivering a lot of folks into new life. She remembers who God is and the promises of God and where that might lead us.

Isaiah is inviting us to remember as well. There’s one other piece of remembering that he has for us, and that is to remember what God wants for you and me. It’s easy to forget, to get too focused on what’s going on in my life right now, to let go of all that has happened, and to not remember. Isaiah invites us to remember. And what is one way of remembering that he suggests? He says we have forgotten to pray. So one way of remembering is to go to God in prayer and to remember who that God is, what that God has done, how that God calls us into the new life in Christ. So one way of remembering is to pray.

Scripture itself is another way of remembering. All that remembering is not just so we will stay focused in the past, however. It’s a remembering that contextualizes, that makes a foundation for, that guides us, into today. It’s not a remembering just for remembering’s sake, but it’s a remembering to give life to us and to guide us into the kingdom of God.

Gracious God, as we come, as we do a little remembering today, be with us. Guide our memories. Help us remember the goodness that you bring, the promises you have brought to us, the new life you share with us, the grace that undergirds us, the love that gives us hope for the future. Lord, thank you. Work with our sometimes faulty memories to help us ever remember who you are, your character, and your call. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.