

## ***“Remembering”***

### [Joshua 4:1-9](#)

Everyone forgets at one time or another. Here and there, we experience lapses of memory, so called, senior moments. Here are some stories of such moments people shared on social media.

“Once I made chicken soup - simmered the carcass for hours with lots of vegetables. Then, when it was all nice and tasty I grabbed a colander and poured all the liquid down the sink. I just stood there for about 5 minutes, staring at the bones trying to remember what the next step in soup-making was.”

“The pipe underneath the sink was leaking, so I had placed a bucket to catch all the water. When the bucket was getting full, I emptied it out on the same sink.”

“I was drinking out of a really colorful mug full of water when I started talking to a coworker about the designs on our mugs. I turned my mug upside down to check and see what design was on the bottom, so had to work the rest of my shift in soggy, squeaky shoes.”

“In the freshmen year of college, I came home for fall break. Next morning, I woke up in my bed at 6 AM, got showered and dressed, grabbed my (old) backpack hanging where I hung it before, went out to stand at the bus stop in front of my house. Seeing the yellow light glare and strobe in the distance, suddenly I realized, ‘Wait...I'm in college now.’ I ran as fast as I could back into the house before anybody on the bus saw me.”

I am relieved to find out that I am not the only one who gets forgetful. I too have many stories of forgetting things, both big and small, including searching for my phone while talking to someone using that phone. Indeed, senior moments are not just for seniors. Nowadays, those mental glitches seem to happen to people of all ages, yes, even to the young.

Forgetting can be frustrating. You cannot remember where you placed certain things, typically, your phone, key, wallet, sunglasses, so you waste your time looking for them. You cannot remember if you locked the door, closed the garage, or turned off the stove. So, within a minute or two of leaving your home, you turn around and go back home only to find out you actually did.

Forgetting can be embarrassing, especially when you cannot remember the names or even faces of people. Not long ago, greeting people after worship service, I asked the person whose name and face I could not remember, “Have I met you before?” and she said, “Of course, you even called me on my birthday.” Oops... How about when you cannot remember what the other person you are conversing with has just said to you? Then, the person asks you, “So, what do you think?”

According to a report on memory research published by the University of Toronto two years ago, while our brains store memories, they also have mechanisms that promote memory loss. Dr. Blake Richards and Dr. Paul Frankland, co-authors of the report, write, “The point of memory is to make you an intelligent person who can make decisions given the circumstances, and an important aspect in helping you do that is being able to forget some information.

To put it simply, we are forgetful people. Forgetting is unavoidable. It is even natural for us to forget, though the degree to which we forget varies widely. Except for some people who seem to have a perfect memory, all of us forget what we learn and experience. Our memories fade as time goes by unless we make an intentional effort to keep them alive.

Perhaps, that is why, in the Bible, there are many passages that talk about remembering. Especially, in the Old Testament, the concept of “remembrance” surfaces quite often. The Israelites are told over and over again to remember what God has done for them. Let us hear some of those instances:

From the book of Exodus,

“... Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...” (Exodus 13:3, NRSV); “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8, NRSV)

From the book of Deuteronomy,

“... Just remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt...” (Deuteronomy 7:18-19, NRSV); “Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness...” (Deuteronomy 8:2, NRSV); “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there...” (Deuteronomy 24:18, NRSV); “Remember the days of old, consider the years long past...” (Deuteronomy 32:7, NRSV)

From the book of Psalms,

“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.” (Psalm 77:11, NIV); “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits.” (Psalm 103:2, NRSV); “Remember the wonderful works he has done... “ (Psalm 105:5, NRSV)

From the book of Ecclesiastes,

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth...” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, NRSV)

And, from the book of Isaiah,

“Remember this and consider, recall it to mind... remember the former things of old...” (Isaiah 46:8-9, NRSV)

In addition to these commands to remember, we find biblical references to monuments, memorials, and institutions that serve as a reminder of God and God’s wondrous deeds. They reinforce memories of those

sacred moments experienced by God's people. Through religious rituals and celebrations, stories of God's mighty acts of salvation were rehearsed and represented, so that they would always be remembered.

In today's scripture, Joshua 4:1-9, we see an example of memorializing God's wondrous and mighty acts. The biblical narrative up to this point is the story of the Israelites' crossing the Jordan River and entering the land of Canaan. As they were about to enter the Promised Land, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, a river blocked their way.

Then, a miracle happened. When the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant began to put their feet in the river, the water ceased flowing, and the people could cross over on dry ground. It was a repeat of what had happened to their parent's generation when they were leaving Egypt and faced the Red Sea in front of them.

When they had all finished crossing the river, Joshua, the new leader of the Israelites, who had been Moses' assistant, ordered to have a simple monument built with 12 stones taken out of the dry river they had crossed. A representative from each of the 12 tribes was asked to deposit one stone each in order to commemorate this wondrous event which led them into the Promised Land. From generation to generation, whenever the children from the respective tribes would ask out of curiosity, "What do these stones mean?" their parents and grandparents could tell them all about how their ancestors crossed the river Jordan -- how a member of their family had laid down one of those stones. So, the sacred story of God's mighty act of salvation would not be forgotten but live on, remembered forever.

Here are some questions that arise out of this story for us today: What are the memorial stones we have established as the church to remind ourselves of what God has done for us and also to stroke the curiosity of our children and younger generation? Could it be that everything we have in the church, both visible and invisible, serve as our memorial stones: all of the buildings on our church campus, including this beautiful sanctuary and everything we see here - the stained glass cross, the pipe organ, the grand piano, the bells, the pulpit, the lectern, the altar, the candles, the banners, the pews, the sacraments of baptism and holy communion we celebrate, the prayers we say, the songs we sing, and the stories we tell? The list goes on and on... And, we thank God for all of these memorial stones that help us know and remember who we are as the church.

What about you? Are there any personal memorial stones you have built to remember who you are and to stroke the curiosity of others about your faith? What reminds you and others around you of who you are, what you believe, what you stand for, what faith community you belong to?

For Katy Perry, a famous American singer and songwriter, one of the memorial stones she has is a tattoo on her wrist that reads "Jesus." Perry got it when she was 18, just before she transitioned from a Christian singer to a mainstream artist. She says about her Jesus tattoo, "I see it every time I'm playing guitar. It's looking back up at me. That's where I come from, and probably, where I'm going back to."

For Ford and Marge Cowell, one of their memorial stones is delivered to their home every week. When I visited them at their home last week, Marge Cowell said to me these words. “Pastor, thank you so much for sending us the church newsletters and your sermons. I love receiving them every week. From the newsletter, I find out what is happening in our church. And, I really enjoy reading your sermons. Your sermons are really good. I always learn a lot from them. I read them first and give them to Ford to read. It’s been awhile since we went to church. But, we always feel closely connected to our church family because of the newsletters and sermons. We really appreciate that you mail them to us every week.”

‘What newsletter?’ you might be wondering because we no longer publish newsletters. There is a Midweek Message our church family and friends receive every week. But, it’s the e-news. No one receives a printed copy of Midweek Message. What Ford and Marge receive in the mail is an envelope from the church, and enclosed in the envelope are a copy of the worship bulletin, a printed copy of the sermon, and a cover letter. The blue addendum in the worship bulletin is what Marge calls the newsletter!

The weekly mailing to the homebound is a vital ministry of our church. Thanks to Ellen Droke’s labor of love, people who cannot attend worship receive the worship bulletin and sermon. Ellen comes to the office every Wednesday to make copies of the sermon and write a cover letter. Then she mails them out to the homebound members of our church, along with the worship bulletin. It is through this weekly mail Ellen faithfully sends out that Ford and Marge and other people remember who they are and what community of faith they belong to. It is their spiritual memorial stone.

For our youth who will be confirmed in two weeks, one such memorial stone will be a special gift from their teacher, Lynn Dellaporta. In the midst of her busy schedule, she has managed to cross-stitch a beautiful cross for each of the confirmands. Along with the other gifts they will receive, the hand-made cross will remind them of their identity as disciples of Jesus Christ and help them remember what they have learned throughout the confirmation journey.

This Monday, we observe Memorial Day, a memorial stone for our country which reminds us of the ultimate sacrifice that the men and women of our military have made for us. We honor their legacy and pass on their stories to the younger generation, reminding ourselves in the process that the freedoms we enjoy now were purchased with the blood of those who served our country.

As we celebrate Memorial Day and remember their sacrifices, let us also take time to remember the wondrous and mighty deeds of God in our lives. May we dwell on our common memory stone of the cross, which reminds us of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which has delivered us from death and the wilderness of our lives and into the promised land of new life. Thanks be to God.