

“The Importance of Remembering”

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Exodus 12:14-17**

Two elderly couples were enjoying friendly conversation when one of the men asked the other, “Fred, how was that memory clinic you went to last month?” “Outstanding,” Fred replied. They taught us all the latest psychological techniques, visualization, and association. It made a huge difference for me.” “That’s great! What was the name of the clinic?” Fed went blank and he thought and thought, but couldn’t remember. Then a smile broke across his face and he asked, “What do you call that flower with the long stems and thorns?” “You mean a rose?” “Yes, that’s it. He turned to his wife... “Rose, what was the name of that clinic?”

Some of us have issues with remembering names, places, dates. All of us need to remember that which is important.

Forgetting that which is important – is harmful, dangerous and often destructive. Our knowledge of our history is waning and this does not bode well for us – specifically our American history and our Christian history. More about our American history on the Fourth of July weekend. (Reserve your pew.)

As for Christian history – remember this one point for today. Christianity is a future oriented faith. There is much talk in the New Testament about the Second coming of Christ, the ending of our world, and the making of a new one, but – with humility (and great wisdom) we are told by Jesus concerning the “close of the age...” “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” (Matthew 24:36). So everyone, you too Rev. Camping, everyone needs to remember that we do not know such things. But there are many things that we need to remember and to live by and through. It’s amazing and troubling that millions of us had heard of this supposed end of the world; rapture nonevent; but too few of us know about basic tenets of our Christian faith or our national republic values – that guided our Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

The importance of remembering!

The past matters for our future. Correctly remembering the past is of paramount importance! People, events, dates, context – all matter!

According to professor Jeffrey Blustein, in his book The Moral Demands of 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! This September will be the 10th anniversary of this terror. For our nation, for our children – it is important to remember!

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. He was of the Greatest Generation!

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.

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

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!

Several years ago, as I visited our beloved 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, and friends.

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

There is value in remembering!

There is learning in remembering!

The importance of 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 (we) are told to remember, memorialize great, important events.

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?

On this Memorial weekend - Remember.

Amen.