

#48 15-16

Psalm 66:1-12

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Luke 17:11-19

2 Timothy 2:8-15

The Art of Remembering Jesus

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Olive Elaine Hinnant wrote in the Lectionary series, "Feasting on the Word" about this scripture thusly:

This portion of the epistle sounds a little like Jimmy Stewart's character in the 1965 civil war movie *Shenandoah*. A pacifist farmer, Stewart is trying to raise seven children without his wife's presence, but with her instructions to help them become good Christians. So he prays over their bountiful dinner, 'Lord, we cleared this land; we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn't be here; we wouldn't be eating it, if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for this food we are about to eat. Amen.'

Rev. Hinnant is paraphrasing Paul as going on about his suffering and then coming up with some benefit from it - even if the benefit is "only" the discipline of gratitude.

But I would say there is much to the discipline of struggling to remember Jesus in all we do - even if it feels like suffering. Let's look at the Old Testament reading a minute. These people are refugees, not home, not safe, sad, scared that they may lose their identity the longer they are away from their homeland. And Jeremiah is telling them to make the most of their lives wherever they may be! Blossom where you are planted - be a blessing to all those around you, wherever you are! Jeremiah is not expecting miracles from the people, nor does he want them to suffer and be miserable - he is saying be God's chosen ones, wherever you are! And that requires no extra effort other than what they would normally do. Just do it without sadness or worry - be God's children as you live your lives.

In our Gospel we have the story of the 10 lepers who were made clean from their disease and only one seemed to remember how that came about and returned to Jesus to share his gratitude. Regardless, however, all 10 were still made clean. Their cures was never taken away from them. Because Jesus can't stop being who he is - and he is faithful, even if we are not.

There is a special art to remembering Jesus. It isn't so easy, because so many things can distract us from remembering. We have our own priorities and distractions from truly remembering Jesus. Sometimes what we remember when we think on Jesus is not him at all - but something someone once said about him - a person we trusted and respected, and therefore it must be true. And it isn't so easy to even notice that what we have believed for the longest time was a Jesus thing, was actually more of a family/cultural tradition - and upon closer look at Jesus' life, our long held belief does not stand up to the words and the life of Christ.

For example, how many of us get really uncomfortable when someone says really kind and complimentary things about us? Or we don't even feel comfortable thinking complimentary things about ourselves? I know I can hear the voices of people from my childhood making sure that I don't boast, or get uppity! All those various influences trying to keep me in my place, make it hard for me to feel God's love for me. It seems almost as though I am unworthy of God's love. AND YET! This is exactly why Christ came to us - so that we could experience and know and feel and be sure of how worthy we are of God's love. So, it can be difficult to remember Jesus, when certain cultural habits do everything in their power to get us to forget.

Another challenge to remembering Jesus, beside the cultural pressure to unlearn what he taught, is our human tendency to make things more complicated than they need to be. We often feel we have to earn God's grace by what we do- and that can get exhausting. Because we never think we can do enough to earn the grace of God. And we are right. We can't. We can never do enough - and yet it is always there for us anyway.

Doing is a good thing. Wanting to do good things for God is a very, very good thing. But, the truth is, what God wants us to do, is to strive to be at peace with Him as much of our days as possible. For when we are centered on God and focused on God's grace and presence in our lives, then we are the best examples and instruments of His power. Being a person focused on God's grace here and now, is a mightier mission than all we can do with our bodies and finances. Being is far more powerful than doing, and being brings joy, is not physically straining, and welcomes the grace of God into the lives of all those around us, let alone our own lives!

The art of remembering Jesus is about a discipline of working through our habits, and deciphering if they are culturally founded or spiritually founded. Christ is not a proponent of one culture over another. Look at our Gospel - again - a Samaritan was the hero of the story - an outsider - a foreigner . . . Christ breaks our ego based limits and want to open up the heavens and offer us eternity! Not just our hometown cultural limits - Jesus wants to give us the universe!

How often, in our fear and insecurity, or even in our boastful egocentric selves(!) do we comfortably ignore Christ's life and words so that we don't have to face the feeling of shame we place upon ourselves when we discover we have been wrong? We may do that more than we are aware. This is the suffering with Christ that the author of this epistle talks of. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead . . . that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal . . . I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him." We are being asked to be willing to let go of all we know from this earth and trust in the love and the grace and glory of remembering Jesus. Let go of our worries and concerns and be the love of God and trust that the love of God will make of each of us and this church, who we need to be to spread his grace and truth. We don't need youthful energy and money galore - all we need is to remember Jesus and love as he would have us love, be ones who treasure his words and teachings more than our habits.

Ours is a life of love and trust and glory and joy and comfort and suffer and all those things that make us a life fully lived. We are being asked to live our lives fully in the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord. And that we can do. Everyone we touch, every life we treasure, every kind gesture - is remembering Jesus. And that is our salvation, now and forevermore. AMEN