

Now may I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Today we mark All Soul's Day, the commemoration of the faithful departed. Of course, it's Veteran's Day, it's also Armistice Day. In fact, Veteran's Day was called Armistice Day 'til 1954 when Eisenhower changed it. So it's no coincidence that Veteran's Day falls on the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice at the end of the first World War, which of course happened almost exactly a hundred years ago on the eleventh hour, on the eleventh month, on the eleventh day, of 1918.

What is it that holds all these things together? What thing can we find to bind all these remembrances together? Well what binds them together is that theme of remembering. They're all about remembering the past and those who have gone before us. It's important to remember, and that comes across very clearly in that Old Testament reading we heard from the book of Deuteronomy. In that passage we could imagine Moses standing before the people at the end of his life, just before they crossed the threshold into the promised land. He stands before them with one simple theme: Do not forget the Lord, your God. Remember him. Don't forget God.

Remembering is important for many reasons. Let me pick out three. First is that remembering shows that we care. I have only ever forgotten one wedding anniversary, it was our first one. I booked a retreat in Scotland but thankfully Laura was already here in California, so I was forgiven. But I've never forgotten since, and if that had become the norm, and I had never remembered, Laura would quite rightly assume that I didn't really care about our marriage. Remembering shows that we care.

It also builds relationships. I have a group of school friends, we don't meet up very often, but when we do we have a great time, and we're still close, and we spend our time in the pub telling stories from over forty year ago. It's those stories that bind us together. We remember Mr. Wheeler, our German teacher who only had one eye. He used to take his

glass eye out, put it on the table and say, "Boys I've got my eye on you." The list goes on. But we still tell these same stories, and we still laugh at the same stories, because they are the memories that we share. That's what binds us together.

Thirdly, remembering establishes our identity. It is to a large extent our memories that make us who we are, which show what we value, which is why Alzheimer's and related illnesses are such a terrible illness because they rob people of their identity. My grandfather lived well into his 90's, he was a great story teller. I know over the years I got very familiar with the stories that he told of his younger years. I noticed that stories weren't spread evenly over his life, they were concentrated in a few small sections of his life that clearly had become the most important in establishing who he was. There were large periods of his life, including the war years, about which he said nothing. Memory is selective. We pick out certain events from our past and they become formative, and we allow our memory to define who we are.

As we tell our life story we can be reminded that remembering can also have future dimension. My grandfather who was a great man of faith, would never forget that he was heaven bound. He was living towards that goal, the place described in the book of Revelation, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, as God shall wipe away all tears. He always remembered that hope that was within him.

Given all this, and the importance of remembering, it comes as no surprise that remembering is actually a central theme of the Bible. In fact, it could be said that the Bible is all about forgetting and remembering. The Bible begins with God's creation, and he calls the people to be his own, and he does this by establishing a covenant with them. They are to be his people, and he will be their God. That's the early part of the Old Testament, and as you read on you realize that these people with whom God is in covenant, have a tendency to forget. There's a recurring theme in the Old Testament, do not forget the covenant that I have

made with you. The psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits."

This was the message of the prophets. They were sent to remind the people of Israel of their covenant obligations. Their mission was to jog the memory of the people. The prophet Jeremiah just simply lamented, "My people have forgotten." The prophets said, "You may forget God but God will never forget you." The Prophet Isaiah says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion in the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will never forget you."

Thus if I was asked to sum up what's the meaning of the word sin in the Bible, wherever people have gone wrong, I'd say it was simply forgetting God, and I think that's still a very modern sin. According to a recent survey, 89% of Americans believe in God. Are 89% of the population in church this morning? Sadly not. Perhaps because they've forgotten God. So I think the job of the church isn't so much persuading people to believe in God, as prompting them to remember. You won't find people in the Bible talking about believing or not believing, it's all about forgetting and remembering.

Many people have a sense of God in their lives, especially in our early years. Perhaps when we're young we're more open to the presence of the divine in our lives and in our world. There are other key moments, say bereavement, or child birth, these are times where God feels close by, when even those who don't come to church, even those who might not be part of the 89%, have a sense of God being close by and with them.

The question is, do we forget as life gets busy and hectic, or do we pursue that which came close to us at one point in our lives? Hear the words again, from Moses, "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, your God." Doesn't this say something about the situation here in La Jolla, La Jolla's sin? I don't think there's a particular vice den or anything in La Jolla, not that I've been looking for it, but I haven't heard of such a place. I think the sin of La Jolla is

not an obvious outward sin, it's more of being a place where God is largely forgotten.

I don't normally make confessions in my sermons, but let me mention my Godfather, a subject that still makes me feel guilty all these years later. I had a very good Godfather, Brian, he never, ever forgot my birthday. Always sent me a birthday card with a few notes inside. Although he lived far away, and I never met him in my later years, he clearly thought of me. But when it came up to drawing a list for our wedding ... I forgot him. I didn't send him an invitation, and I still regret forgetting him. Isn't that what we do with God? There's a constancy about God and his memory of us, but we are so quick to forget and he gets pushed out of the picture.

The life of Jesus Christ can be understood as God's final and ultimate promise to his people. God came in Christ to say, "You've forgotten me, so I'm going to come in a way that you'll never forget." If two friends forget each other, a relationship dies, but if one friend just constantly chivvies [*Look it up. -ed.*] the other person, then a friendship can be rekindled. God and Jesus Christ were chivvying us to remember.

Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist recognized this. When he hears of Jesus' birth he said, "The Lord has remembered his holy covenant. He came to prompt us to remember." And in this Eucharist we remember the God who remembers us. We remind ourselves each week as we break bread, as we take the cup, that we do this because Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

As we gather to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross, and in his life, and resurrection, all three aspects that I mentioned of remembering are present. We show that we care for Jesus' sacrifice as we come each week and hear the story. We remember that we don't take it for granted. Secondly, as we hear the story again it builds relationships between us. We are the forgiven people, we are those for whom God in Christ gave his life, and that we are made one in Him as the bonds between us deepen. Finally, this act of

Eucharist establishes our communal identity. We are a community of the redeemed, we are those for whom Christ died, we are one forgiven people.

And I've a P.S. Do you remember the last reference to remembering in the gospels? It was at the crucifixion. Jesus was crucified between two convicts, one of whom is known as the penitent thief and he said to Jesus as he died, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And that's our prayer today, as we remember all those who have gone before us, those who have died in the faith, those who've died in war. As we remember them, we also remember the God who never forgets us.

Amen.