

May I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

At this time of year, when the leaves fall, the nights draw in, and darkness falls early, which you call Fall, but the proper word for it is autumn, the church's calendar invites us to a season of remembering. Last week we celebrated All Saints Day, and that soon followed by All Souls Day, and it's no coincidence that Veteran's Day is included in this season.

In the UK today, today is Remembrance Sunday. It's the nearest Sunday to the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, when the first world war ended. It's important to remember, and this comes across very strongly in our Old Testament reading, which I want to focus on this morning. This sermon, this talk, harks back to the series we had recently on Moses. Remember we looked at his story, as told in the book of Exodus.

In this passage from the book of Deuteronomy, which is made up of lots of Moses' sermons, we can imagine, having been reminded of that story, of Moses towards the end of his life gathering the people of Israel together as they get close to the Promised Land. They've been wandering in the wilderness for many years. Do you remember, their journey started in slavery. They crossed the Red Sea. They're wandering around until they get to the Promised Land. Here they're on the threshold. Moses at that point was looking at the Promised Land, gives a sermon with a very simple theme, Don't Forget God. "Be careful," he says, "that you do not forget the Lord your God." Don't forget God. Remember Him.

Remembering is important for at least three reasons. The first is that it shows we care. I have only ever once forgotten our anniversary. It was the first one. I booked to be on retreat in Scotland, but thankfully Laura had also forgotten, and she was here in California, so I got away with it. I've never forgotten since, and that's good, because if that had become the norm, if I never remembered our anniversary, Laura would, quite rightly, assume that I didn't value our marriage, that I kind of took it for granted. Remembering shows we care. That's

why we remember veterans on this Veterans Day. By doing so we show that we care for our freedom that came as a result of their sacrifice.

Remembering also builds relationships. I have a group of friends that I was at school with. We don't see each other very often, but when we do we have a great time, and we spend most of our time telling stories that are now over 40 years old. We laugh about Mr. Wheeler, the German teacher with a glass eye. He used to take his eye out, put it on the desk and say, "I've got my eye on you boys." We laugh about Mr. Belli, our sturdily built rowing coach who once got over-excited and rowed off the river bank and down into the river while he was coaching us. The list goes on. Our times together are very long, and very fun. We tell the stories as those are the memories that we share. They're an important part of what binds us together.

Thirdly, remembering establishes our identity. It is to a large extent our memories that make us who we are, which is why Alzheimer's is such an awful disease, because it robs people of identity. My grandfather always had a very clear mind. He lived well into his 90s. He was a great story teller. Over the years I got very familiar, I mean very, very familiar, with the stories that he told. We heard them a lot at family gatherings, and the more I listened to them I realized that these stories weren't evenly spread throughout his life, that actually they were drawn from very distinct periods of his life, certain formative times. There were large periods of his life, including the war, about which he said nothing.

Memory is selective. We pick out certain events which then define who we are, that give us our sense of identity. Our memory defines who we are. As we tell our life story, we're reminded that remembering can have a future dimension. My grandfather 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, because God will have wiped away every tear. He always remembered the hope that was before him.

Given all this, and the importance of remembering,

it comes perhaps as no surprise that remembering is a very important biblical theme. In fact, it could be said that the story of the Bible can be told in terms of forgetting and remembering. The Bible begins with the story of God creating, and pretty soon He makes a people for His own, and He does this by establishing a covenant, a special relationship with Him. They are to be His people, and He will be their God. That's the early part of the Old Testament. As you read on, it becomes very obvious that the people had a tendency to forget. There's a common refrain running through the Old Testament. "Do not forget the covenant that I have made with you," the Lord says. 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 obligations under the covenant they had with God. Their mission was to jog Israel's memory. Jeremiah lamented, "My people have forgotten," and the prophet said, "You may forget God, but He hasn't forgotten you," and the Prophet Isaiah puts this in a beautiful image. He says, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child that she has born? Though she may forget, I will never forget you."

If I was asked to sum up the Old Testament's definition of sin, it might be that we could say that the sin that we see running throughout the Bible is primarily the sin of forgetting God. I think that's still a very modern sin. I've just read the latest survey of religious beliefs and apparently, according to this survey, 89% of Americans believe in God, which is nearly 20% higher than the UK, but do 89% of people go to church every Sunday? No. Why? Because they've forgotten God. I think the job of the church isn't so much persuading people to believe in God, it's about jogging their memory. It's prompting people to remember, because that's what we see in the Bible, not so much an attempt to persuade people to change their mind, but to call them back to what they remember.

I think most people have some sense in their lives of God's presence. All young people, I think I would say just about all in my experience, are innately

spiritual. Most of us when we're young don't have a problem thinking that we are fearfully, and wonderfully made. We, when we're young, are much more likely to be impressed by the beauty, and the wonder of creation. I remember spending lots of time looking at worms, being just intrigued by how weird they were, and just thinking, what an amazing creation that God has made.

When we have children, that's a time when lots of people think, where on Earth did this life come from? What am I gonna teach this child? There's lots of stages in life when God seems very real, when we are mindful of God's presence in the world, but how soon we forget. We think of other things. We get distracted. Hear these words again from that reading from Deuteronomy. "When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses, and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God. Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth,' but remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you power to get wealth."

Doesn't that describe La Jolla's sin? La Jolla's a nice place, full of very polite people. There is no center of vice in La Jolla, not as far as I'm aware, not that I've been looking for one. La Jolla is not a place of obvious outward sin, but it might be said that it's a place where God is largely forgotten. I don't normally make confessions in my sermons, but let me just tell you about my godfather, Brian. I had a very good godfather. He always sent me birthday cards, and Christmas cards with a note in. Never forgot. I never met him because he lived a very long way away, but he clearly thought of me. When it came to drawing up a wedding list of guests to invite, I forgot him, and I still regret forgetting him, especially when he called my mother and asked when the wedding was two weeks after we were already married.

Isn't that what we do with God, who never forgets us? He gets pushed out of the picture. The life and death of Jesus can be understood in these terms, as God's ultimate prompt to His people. God came in

Christ to say, "You've forgotten me, but I'm gonna do something that you will never, ever forget. Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, recognized this. When he heard of the baby Jesus he said, "The Lord has remembered His holy covenant. The coming of Jesus was God's promise, to remind us that He's always been there, 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. Why do we do this? We do it 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 resurrection, those three aspects of remembering that I mentioned earlier are fully present in this Eucharist. We show that we care for Jesus' sacrifice, that we don't take it for granted. As we hear the story again, we build relationships between us. We deepen the bonds between us as we remember that we are made one in Him by what He has done for us. Then, we also, by this act, establish a community identity. We're a community of the redeemed. We are those for whom Christ died. We are a forgiven, and a forgiving people.

I've got a P.S. Do you remember the last reference to remembering in the gospels? It's in the gospel of Luke. It's at the crucifixion. Jesus died between two thieves. One of them was called the penitent thief. We don't know his name, but that's how we know him, because in his dying words, his dying breath, he turned to Jesus and said, "Remember me when you come into your Kingdom." That's our prayer today as we remember the God who has not forgotten us.

Amen.