

I'd like to begin by thanking my mother who sent over a box of poppies from England, like this one. So, at church on Sunday, we'll all have a poppy to wear. And today is an important day to remember. It's always good to remember. Particularly today, we remember those who've served in our armed forces, so I'm going to stick with that theme of remembering. I was struck when reading that passage from Deuteronomy, that it was a sermon given by Moses who was standing in front of the people, just on the cusp of entering into the promised land after forty years wandering in the wilderness. And as he addresses the people, he doesn't choose to cast a vision of what great things lie before them. Instead, he encourages them to remember. "Remember the way the Lord God has led you these 40 years," he says, and our reading ends with Moses encouraging the people not to forget the Lord, your God.

He knew the importance of remembering. I can think of three particular ways that remembering is important. The first is that it shows that we care. I have only ever once forgotten my wedding anniversary. Actually, it was our first wedding anniversary. I booked a retreat in Scotland. Thankfully, Laura, my wife, had also forgotten and she booked a trip over here in California. I've not forgotten since and if that had indeed become the norm and I never remembered our anniversary, then Laura might quite rightly assume that I didn't care about our marriage because remembering shows that we care, that it's important to us. And today we remember our veterans because we care about their sacrifice and the freedom that comes as a benefit of their service.

Secondly, remembering builds relationships. I have a group of schoolmates who I meet up with sadly only very infrequently, but we always enjoy being together and we spend our time telling the same stories that we've been telling for 40 years. We laugh about Mr. Wheeler, the German teacher who had a false eye. He used to take his eye out, put it on the desk and say, "I've got my eye on you, boys." Or we laugh about Mr. Belly. The very studly built crew coach who once got so enthusiastic about his coaching that he cycled off the tow path into the river. And these things still make us laugh. We know the punchlines. We still laugh. We tell stories because

those memories that we share are an important part of what binds us together. Those shared remembrances make us a group.

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 a cruel disease.

My grandfather lived well into his nineties, and he was a great storyteller. Over the years, I got very familiar with these stories and talk of his younger years, and I came to realize that at some point that his stories weren't evenly spread throughout his life. They were concentrated on various key periods in his life, certain formative periods. There were large periods of his life which he used to say nothing about because memory is selective. We pick out certain events to celebrate and remember because they have a formative influence. And we allow that memory to some extent to define who we are. And the same is true of society, hence the current debates about memorials.

And as we tell our life story, we are reminded that our remembering has a future dimension. My grandfather would never forget that he was heaven bound. He was living towards that goal. He was looking forward to the new heaven and the new earth. As Christians, we remember that as Jesus says in our gospel reading, the end is still to come. We're living in the between times, the times when there is constantly war and rumors of war.

Given all this and the importance of remembering, it comes perhaps as no surprise that remembering is a key biblical theme. In fact, it could be said that the story of the Bible could be told in terms of remembering and forgetting. The Bible begins with God creating, and he then calls a people to be his own, and he does this by establishing a covenant with them. They are to be his people and they will be his God. That's the early part of the Old Testament. And as we read on through those scriptures, we find that the people have 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," saith the Lord. The psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits." And it was this call to remember that was the call of the

prophets. They were sent to remind the people of their covenant obligations. The mission of the prophets was to jog Israel's memory. Jeremiah lamented, "My people have forgotten." The prophet said, "You may forget God, but he has not forgotten you." We read these words in the prophet Isaiah, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child that she has born? Though she may forget, God says, 'I will not forget you.'"

And I think that's still a very modern sin. I've just read the latest set of beliefs amongst the American society, and it says that 89% of Americans believe in God. Are there 89% of Americans in a place of worship this morning? No, because there's a tendency to forget, it's as real now as it was in the biblical times. And it's because of this that I think the job of the church isn't so much persuading people to believe in God, rather 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, in fact, I'd say almost most people, have had a sense of God at some point in their lives. There's been a time when they've been aware of some higher power, some divine presence, whether it's been on a mountaintop, whether it's at the birth of a child, there's something that's happened to make that person think of God.

What happens is that memory fades, that we all have a tendency to forget God. Says in Deuteronomy, "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God." And that situation, I think describes our situation here in La Jolla. There's no great center of vice here, not that I've been looking for one, but I don't think there is. It's a nice place full of nice people. There's no obvious outward sin, but it might be said to be a place where God is largely forgotten.

I don't normally make confessions in my sermons but let me mention my godfather. I had a very good godfather. He was very considerate, and regularly sent me birthday cards. Well, he did send me birthday cards until the event I'm about to relate. I never met him. He lived a long way away, but he was certainly clearly thinking of me.

But when it came to drawing up a wedding list for our wedding, I didn't remember him, and I still regret forgetting him. And isn't that what we do with God? In the busyness, in the comfortableness of life, God can get pushed out and forgotten. The life and death of Jesus can be understood in these terms, as God's ultimate prompt, God coming amongst us to remind us of his presence with us and his ongoing steadfast love for us. God in Christ came to say, "You've forgotten me, but I'm going to do something that you'll never forget." If two friends forget each other, a friendship dies, but if one friend chivvies the other, then a relationship and a friendship can be rekindled. The coming of Jesus can be understood in those terms, God coming to rekindle, remind us of that relationship. In our weekly Eucharist, we remember the God who remembers us. We remind ourselves each week as we break bread that we do it because as Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

And as we remember what Jesus did for us on the cross and in his resurrection, all three aspects of remembering that I mentioned earlier are present. We show that we care for Jesus' sacrifice because we don't take it for granted. And as we hear the story again, it builds the relationships between us. We deepen the bonds as we recognize that we are made one in him. And all this acts to establish our common identity. We are a community of the redeemed. We are those for whom Jesus died. We are a remembered and forgiven people, and I've got a PS. Do you remember the last reference to remembering in the gospels? It was at the crucifixion. Jesus was crucified between two convicts. One has come to be known as the penitent thief. And he said to Jesus as he died, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." That's our prayer today is we remember those who served in our armed forces. We also remember the God who has not forgotten us. Amen.