



The Trinity Pulpit



Things Remembered Ephesians 1:15-23

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You find the kiosk, and sometimes the store called “Things Remembered”, in almost every mall. This store is filled with all sorts of products whose main function is to celebrate or commemorate some moment. There are graduation, wedding, and birthday presents, just to name a few. Most of the items are small like money clips, portfolio pads, pens, or clocks. And on these items there are usually some inscriptions of the occasion, such as the date, a congratulatory statement, and the recipient’s name. Things Remembered has as its marketing strategy the concept that people want to remember special moments in life, and they need a product to make the memory concrete. The thought behind this concept is that we can choose to remember.

When we think about our memory, we know it is a powerful force in our lives. Our minds are full of every experience and every person we have ever seen or experienced. With that memory or moment there are certain connected emotions that sometimes surface at strange and unexpected times. We sometimes don’t know why we always cry when a certain song is played. We don’t fully understand why a familiar road, a smell that reminds us of our childhood, or a picture of a loved one who has passed, can cause memories and emotions to erupt in our lives like a sleeping volcano suddenly coming to life. For many of us, our memory seems beyond our control or initiative. In many ways, we live as prisoners to memory. The thoughts we try to suppress are the very ones that we become obsessed with, and the things we need to remember – like where did I leave my keys? – remain a mystery.

What are we to do with the power of memory? In his book, *A Room Called Remember*, author Frederick Buechner writes of a dream that taught him about memory. He recounts a dream where he was staying in a beautiful hotel room – it was roomy, bright, and pleasant. He described it as “a place where I felt happy and at peace, where everything seemed the way it should be and everything about my self seemed the way it should be.” However, in the dream he was able to wander off from the room and experience other activities, after which he

returned to the hotel room. Then he found himself in a room that was cramped, dark, and uncomfortable. When he approached the man at the desk about why his room had changed, he inquired if he could again have the room he had enjoyed. The man at the desk was very helpful and said that Buechner could have the pleasant room anytime he wanted; he only had to ask for it by name. Buechner then asked “What is the name of the room I am requesting?” The man at the desk said with certainty, “The name of the room you want is Remember.” It was then that Buechner awakened from his dream. He was startled by the dream, but at the same time he felt a great peace. He realized from the dream that this room called Remember could be his at any moment.

Then he writes “...memories that come and go on their own and apart of any choice of ours are the ways we view memory. Things remind us, and the power is the thing’s and not ours. The room called Remember, on the other hand is a room we can enter whenever we like so the power of remembering can become our own power.”¹

There is power in remembering. There is power in reflecting on memories that give us power and hope. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to this type of proactive remembering. David says “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.” (1 Chronicles 16:12) Jesus reminds us that the Lord’s Supper is a time to remember him. We are to remember the Lord’s death until he comes again. Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit will come to remind us of the words he has spoken. There is power in remembering. What are some things worth remembering?

Here in the introduction of Ephesians, Paul reminds us of some things worth remembering. The book of Ephesians is sometimes thought to be Paul’s supreme letter. Many believe it was a circular letter; so although it was addressed to the Ephesians, it was a letter meant to be read in all

the churches. This was not simply a message for a particularly troubled church or for a situation that needed Paul's pastoral advice. This was the height of Paul's theology which had been developed over spending his life with the power of Jesus Christ as the center of his life. Ephesians and Colossians are viewed as Paul's theology being perfected. Paul had concluded that all things in nature, in time, in eternity, and in this life are found in Christ, and meaning in all things is found only as Christ is at the center. Paul uses Ephesians to teach us how to live out our faith in all areas of our lives, including church, the culture, and the home.

Paul begins by reminding us that remembering is the first act that leads us to this power of Christian living. What did Paul remember and call us to remember?

First, we are called to remember the people of God. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, and his prison cell had become his room called Remember. It was there he remembered those who had filled his life: the saints in all of the cities where he had passed. He was remembering those who had received the good news he had preached. I am sure he was also remembering those who had aided him on his journey. He was recalling faces, names, and places. He was thinking about those who were close and dear and those who had been there but for a brief moment in his adventurous life. So, all of them who had come to faith in Christ he was remembering. Paul writes "Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." (Ephesians 1:15-16)

Who did Paul choose to remember? He chose to remember those who had faith in Jesus and those who loved the saints, the church. There are many people in our lives that we can choose to remember: those who have us, those who influenced us in ways that brought us harm, those who forgot us, or those who we felt betrayed us. When we choose to remember them, it is easy for us to long for a room called Remember, where the memories are pleasant and good. Like Paul, we can choose to remember those who have brought us life and influenced us in the ways of Christ.

I have been blessed because I can think of so many people who have blessed my life. I have had the experience of being surprised by the love, generosity, and devotion of people, and I have seen the hearts of people who loved the Lord and his church. When it comes to remembering, I have so many memories that I can choose which will bring me certainty of God's love, concern, and work. I recently had a talk with one of my older cousins who told me of a conversation she had with my Grandmother Roberts. My Grandmother Roberts – or

Granny as we called her – was the wife of a Baptist preacher. Her life was filled with making a home and assisting my grandfather in ministry. In so many ways, his ministry was as much hers, and upon his death, more hers than his. Yet, her life was not filled with ease but with much sorrow. Two of her children died as young people. Her oldest died of polio at the age of 12. My father's twin, Guy, died in his early 20s, after being an invalid his whole life as the result of something that went wrong during childbirth. He never walked, and he never could care for himself. He was not to live a long life, but because of the care he received and the grace of God, he lived until he was in his 20's. My grandmother lost her husband when he was only 51. Then, my father died at 45. My cousin told me that not long after my father had died she had a conversation with my grandmother. She asked her, "How do you do it? How are you not bitter? You have buried 3 of your 5 children, and you were widowed at such a young age." My cousin said it was like her words were news to my grandmother. Her response was, "Oh child, I have lived a blessed and happy life. God has given to me years filled with the presence of people who loved me, and most of all, the presence of God which sustains me in all situations." When my grandmother chose to remember, she did not remember the pain and grief, although it was real; instead, she chose to remember a God who had blessed her with family and friends.

What we choose to believe is really important. When we enter the room called Remember, we can choose what we will remember. When you enter there, who will you remember? Why not choose to remember those who have influenced your life in ways that has brought you hope, life, and meaning? Why not choose to remember the people whom God used that brought you to faith, and who have encouraged you in just the right moments? Remember the people of God; they are worth remembering.

We should also remember the experience of God in our lives. Paul reminds us that by remembering, we can become certain of God's work in our lives. Paul's prayer for those in the church is a reminder of God's work in our lives. Paul is praying for two things to occur in the lives of those in the Christian church. First, he was praying that God the Father would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they would know him better. Paul is reminding us that knowing God is an experience that is ever-changing and growing. Our experience with God is not a one-time experience or even just a moment here or a moment there. The prayer of Paul is that we might have the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we might have revelation, which is the work of God. Revelation is God revealing his ways, thoughts, and character to us. It is something that is

hidden and then uncovered. Paul wanted us to have this experience of revelation from God so we might know him better. The word “know” is the word for experience. It is not that we might simply have intellectual knowledge of God. Paul’s prayer is much more personal than intellectual knowledge. Paul’s prayer is that we might experience God in a personal way.

The way this is written is that God is continually revealing his self to us that we might continually be experiencing more of God. In this way, God becomes who we remember when we make the choice to remember. Because we have experienced God through God’s revelation, we now have experiences with God to recall in moments when we need peace, comfort, and power. Revelation gives us the opportunity to experience God and create a memory with God.

The second image Paul uses is that God might enlighten our hearts so that we might know the hope to which we were called. The phrase “enlighten our hearts” is a term that speaks of realization. It is coming to understand but more so, it is to believe and to have a conviction about something. Paul wanted us to have a realization that becomes a conviction in the hope to which we were called.

When we remember the experience of God in our lives, that is where we find hope. When we take time to remember, we become keenly aware of God’s presence in our lives. We recall the moments when we chose the wrong way, but God did not leave us. We recall the moments we were sure would overwhelm us and take our lives – and if not our lives, all of our joy – but we have survived. When we remember where we have been, what we have been, and what we have become, we see God and we know that hope is our gift from God.

Augustine believed that hope was the best of the three virtues. “Faith only tells us that God is,” he said. “Love only tells us that God is good. But hope tells us that God will work God’s will.” Buechner says of hope that “it is up to its knees in the past and keeps its eyes on the future...To remember the past is to see that we are here today by grace that we have survived is a gift.”² To remember our experience with God is a thing worth remembering, because in those memories are born the hope for God’s presence in the future.

Henri Nouwen writes “Hope means to keep living amid desperation and to keep humming in the darkness. Hoping is knowing that there is love; it is trust in tomorrow; it is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises. In the midst of a gale at sea, it is to discover land. In the eyes of another, it is to see that he understands you. As long as there is still hope, there will also be prayer. And God will be holding you in his hands.”³ Therefore, remembering our experiences with God are things worth remembering.


Lastly, let us remember the power of God. Paul reminds us of the power of God in our lives. It is his prayer that we might experience the power of God like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms.

We need to remember the power of God that is available in our lives. Paul is continually encouraging the believers to understand that the power of resurrection is available in our lives, not only for life after death but for the living of our days. What can we know of this power of God that is like resurrection power?

I want you to remember that God’s power is most of the time exerted the strongest and is most evident in the moments of trial and difficulty. Paul reminds us that God exerted his strength to raise Jesus from the dead. It was in the darkest moment of human history, when we had put to death God’s one and only son, that God’s power was supremely and completely exerted.

Some of us are passing through our darkest moments in a long time. We are filled with grief, pain, anxiety, and trouble. We have physical pain, emotional pain, and the pain of uncertainty. Remember, God’s power is exerted and is many times most evident in the moment of darkness.

I want you to remember God’s resurrection power creates unexpected moments. When Jesus died, all seemed to be lost; people do not rise again from the dead. All that Jesus had taught, done, and promised seemed in vain, but God’s power produced resurrection which created the unexpected moment for God to be glorified and for us to have life. God’s power is about creating unexpected moments. God is the creator of all things and this quality of God’s creative power continues. God is always and forever a creative force; it is God’s nature.



*“When we
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We must remember that when there seems to be no way, no exit, and no choice, that is when God's power can produce an unexpected moment.

I want you to remember that God's power is not only restorative but transforming. God raised Jesus from the dead but that is not end of Paul's proclamation. He not only restored Jesus to life but he placed him at the right hand of God in heavenly realms. Jesus is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the age to come. God placed everything under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything and every way." (Ephesians 1:21-23)

The power that God exerted in Christ Jesus was not simply restorative; it made everything new. This power of God has the possibility to change everything. It has the power to do what we could not even imagine. Do you imagine that you want better for your life than what God desires for your life? If so, your view of God is

skewed. Sometimes our problem is we settle for second best instead of God's will. Here is how Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 2:9:

*No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him.*

How long has it been since you have been to a room called Remember? How long has it been since you did not let things and circumstances and their memory have power over you, but instead you chose to remember the people of God, the experience of God, and the power of God? It is the power of remembering to remember God that grants us hope, peace, and the power for living. Come on in...come on in...come to this room called Remember. It is there that we recall the things of God... things worth remembering. ❁

¹Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember: Uncollected Pieces* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984) 2-5.

²Buechner, 11.

³Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (Ave Maria Press, 1984) 85.

