

Psalm 106 – *A Psalm of Remembrance*



Ask most people to explain how *memory* or *remembering* works and they’ll say it’s something like this...

Your brain is a filing cabinet and each memory is stored in a folder. So if I wanted to remember my fifth birthday, I’d go to the filing cabinet that is my brain. Find the folder marked “Fifth Birthday” and “remember” all the details of the day. How there’d been a blizzard that dumped 30” of snow and so my friends and I celebrated by playing in the snow banks and got all muddy so we were going to have pizza, cupcakes and ice cream outside, but then a thunderstorm came and we had to move in the garage and the thunder shook the whole garage. But all my friends were there, Josh and Jason and...those other two kids (I could never remember their names).



Or if I wanted to remember the day I was confirmed at Saron Lutheran Church, I could pull out the folder marked “Confirmation” and “remember” Pastor Sam and the three other boys I was confirmed with. I could “remember” the Entrance Hymn was “For the Beauty of the Earth” and that for the Sixth Sunday of Easter the Gospel Reading was John 14 where Jesus promises his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned.” Of course, I can’t remember what Pastor Sam preached on, but really... who ever remembers the sermon?

Or if I wanted to “remember” my high school graduation day. Or my first kiss. Or the first time I lied to my parents. Or my first day as a freshman in college. Or my wedding day. Or the day my son was born. Or any other “memory.” The idea is that all you have to do is to be able to find the folder in the filing cabinet.



The problem is... this is not how “remembering” works. Not at all. And it isn’t just that the analogy is outdated. Our ‘remember-ers’ are no more like a computer with a hard-drive, internal four giga-herz mega-processor than our brains are an old filing cabinet. Remembering is complex, certainly; complicated, even. But memory is more than one’s and zero’s to the nth degree. Remembering is so much more than pulling out the right file folder and blowing the dust it off.

Scientists have actually done incredibly studies (and I apologize, but I’ve long forgotten what they did exactly in these studies...), but studies that show when you “remember” it really is not an over-statement to say that there are parts of your brain, parts of you that *literally re-live that moment*. And so in remembering, you create a new memory.



Maybe that’s why Psalm 106 is so long. There’s a lot to remember, isn’t there? The story of God’s steadfast love for God’s people is as long as time itself even if there are parts which we would just as soon forget.

But Psalm 106 kind of reads like a bunch of friends and family sitting around a campfire in the evening, doesn’t it? One person looks up at the stars and he says boldly, “Hallelujah! Give thanks to the LORD for the LORD is good,” and someone next to him nods her head and replies nostalgically, “God’s mercy endures forever.”

But then the skeptic across the campfire says, “*Yeah, but* who can declare the mighty acts of the LORD or proclaim *in full* God’s praise?” And a hush falls over the campfire – a silence that need not be spoken whispers: “Remember me... Remember us, O LORD, with the favor you have for your people.”

And once the silent hush has settled in like a heavy snow, then all of a sudden the stories start flowing. Do you remember what happened to our ancestors back in Egypt? Do you remember what happened to them by the Red Sea? Yeah, and do you remember what they did in the wilderness?

And for forty-some odd verses, the Psalm goes on more like a story than a prayer (but really are they so different?).

The Psalm, the story goes on like this: “*they* did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love” ... “But *you* saved them.” The Psalm, the story goes on “But *they* soon forgot your deeds...[and] *they* put you to the test” but “*you* gave them what they asked.” And the Psalm, the story goes on “Then *they* refused the pleasant land and would not believe your promise” and yet “Many times *you* delivered them...”

And that’s the pattern of the psalm for forty-some odd verses: back-and-forth from “*They*” (those people we’re telling the story about, *our ancestors*, yes but certainly not *us*) and “*You*” (God of steadfast love and mercy who sometimes got really pissed off at *your* people, but who generally loved the hell out of ‘em).

But then something happens in the last two verses. “*They*” and “*them*” becomes “*we*” and “*us*.” “*Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us,*” verse 47 prays. “*Gather us.*” “*Assemble us.*” “*Re-member us.*” is another way of putting it. “*Make us a member again*” of your family, of your body again.



But what about forgetting? Is forgetfulness really the opposite of remembering?

One of the privileges (and I don’t use that word lightly)... one of the privileges of being a pastor is being let-in to peoples’ homes, lives and stories.

In just a little bit, we’re going to sing a song that could easily have been written about a few of the folks I’ve had the privilege to visit now or then, someone suffering from dementia or Alzheimer’s.

“*When memory fades, and recognition falters,*” the first verse goes:

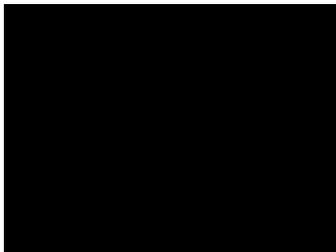
*when eyes we love grow dim, and minds confused,
speak to our souls of love that never alters;
speak to our hearts, by pain and fear abused.*

I know it might not seem like much of a privilege to visit someone whose memory has faded like this, whose recognition has faltered; but inevitably what happens (more often than you’d probably think) is after you try to strike up a conversation and it goes nowhere; and after you try to make small talk about the weather and you’re lucky if they know what month, let alone what season it is; *more often than you’d think...*

...when you say as a pastor, “You know I brought communion today...” those dim eyes and that confused mind seem to light up, even if just for a moment.

And not always, but *more often than you’d think* as you start speaking words of remembrance: “Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid...” or “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...” or “In the night in which he was betrayed...” or “*Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...*” or “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

More often than you’d think the lips which are about to receive the body and blood of Jesus whisper the exact words along with you. The mind that you had thought couldn’t remember, somehow is re-membered in the story and in the word and in the meal.



Brothers and sisters in Christ, it’s why we pray the psalms and it’s why we come to church. Because even the faithful are forgetful. I’m not just talking about forgetting where you put your cell phone or the car keys.

Wandering in the world with these bodies so frail, these minds so frail, these hearts so frail, these souls so frail... we are no better than the one who wanders the halls of the nursing home barely knowing their own name, let alone where they put their car keys or who loves them.

Psalm 106 tells the story – a prayer of re-membering – so that in the speaking and in the praying we are re-membered into the body of Christ and the family of God. Psalm 106 reminds us not only that “the LORD is good, [and] God’s mercy endures forever.” But it is a story in which each time we remember it, we re-live it.

There’s no question there are parts we’d just as soon forget. Like that time... You know the time I’m talking about. But thanks be to God that we are a part of it and thanks be to God we can say boldly, “Blessed be the LORD... from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say ‘Amen!’ Hallelujah!”

Amen! Hallelujah!