

## DO NOT REMEMBER

Lent 5 Year C

Is. 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:4b-14; Jn12:1-8

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Once there were two old men chatting. One of the men said to the other, “You know, I’ve been taking a new memory pill lately, and it is just amazing. I remember everything.”

The other man said, “That sounds wonderful. I think I need to take it too. What is the name of that pill?”

The first man said, “Well, let’s see.... the name of that pill was.... Hmmmm. Well, tell me, what is the name of that flower... with the thorns? It’s red. You know, the one they give at Valentine’s.”

The other man replied, “You mean a rose?”

The first man said, “Yes, that’s right!” Then, calling into the kitchen he said, “Rose, what’s the name of that pill?”

We have to remember lots of things in life—to take the bins out, to mow the lawn, to your spouse’s birthday, and even more importantly, your wedding anniversary. And let’s not forget—all of the dates of your children’s’ birthdays—and the grand kids—you get the picture.

The Bible is big on remembering. We are told to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” The people of Israel were to institute the Passover so that they would remember that they had been slaves in Egypt, but then God had delivered them. They were to remember the law and bind it on their forehead (phylacteries). They were to remember the covenant they had made with the one true God. We are also to remember the things we have been taught, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion we celebrate it in remembrance of Jesus Christ—and so on. So remembering things is very important.

But there are also things we must “remember not.” In the last verse of our text God says, *“I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”* If God does not remember our sins, then, perhaps, we should forget them too.

After we have taken our sins, our most embarrassing moments, our failures, and laid them at the foot of the cross, we need to then let go of them. We need to remember them not.

Perhaps you're like me, in a war with your brain. My mind seems to gravitate to all the mistakes and all the embarrassing moments of my life and pass right over my successes. I have to work hard to remember a few good things I have done in life to overcome a mind that dwells on the negative. People like us need to learn to "remember not." The difficulty is knowing which things to remember and which things to forget.

We need to know when to which. By following the Bible and the guidance of the Spirit, we can have a better idea of when we need to remember and when we need to remember not.

It is vitally important that we get it right because only then can God do his new work among us. God says to us and to Israel, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

First of all, let's set this text in its context. Isaiah was writing to a people in exile. We can only try to imagine the difficulties that this placed on their lives. They had known the greatness of Israel during the glory days of David and Solomon. Even the Queen of Sheba marveled at the success of Israel during her visit there. But now the nation has not only declined but has been conquered. Jerusalem has been devastated and the Temple destroyed. The people have been humiliated and taken into captivity.

And so all their memories seem to be painful ones. In Psalm 137, one of them proclaims, *"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy."* Here was a people haunted by the memories of their former greatness.

They were also haunted by the memories of their sin. The prophets had made it clear to them that their exile was a direct result of turning their backs on the one true God. Now they had to admit that they deserved the punishment they were receiving.

Isaiah tries to convince them that God wants to do a new thing among them. God wants to restore them to their country. But the people can't believe the good news because their memories are so filled with bad news. For decades they have lived in captivity, away from their homeland, separated from their customs and rituals, away from the place that gave them their identity and calling. They have lived in the humiliation of

being captive, and they have been haunted by the memory of their spiritual infidelities, which they believe have brought them to this place.

And so the prophet offers them a two-fold invitation, a two-fold vision: Do not remember the former things...I am about to do a new thing;"

Do you see what he is saying here? Isaiah is telling those in captivity, "If you want to move on to what God has in store for you, then you have to leave the past behind." And that's so true of many things in our lives, isn't it—particularly when it relates to matters of faith and spiritual growth. If we want to move forward as Christians, there are certain things we have to let go of.

There may be situations and people for which proper reconciliation would be an aid to moving on with God. Sometimes the past has a hold on us that we need to get rid of. It uses up our energy and depletes our soul. As the theologian Paul Tillich states: "We cannot be born anew if the power of the old is not broken within us." Growth demands sacrifice. We have to forget the old things so that we can see the new things God is doing.

There are many of us today who can identify with the people of Israel in this regard. Many of us have painful memories of failures and tragedies that haunt us every day. We too have difficulty finding the positive possibilities in life because we are still tied to the past like an anchor that keeps us from moving forward.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in life is to remember the things we need to remember and forget the things we need to forget. After we have taken our sins, our most embarrassing moments, our failures and laid them at the foot of the cross, we need to let go of them. We need to "not remember them" any more.

It's important that we understand this because it's only when we do not remember them any more, that God can do his new work among us. God says to us and to Israel, "*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*" In other words, stop looking behind you. What is past is past. Rather, look forward to the new thing that God is doing in you and through you.

Years later, Jesus came on the scene and proclaimed, *“No one puts a piece of new cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into new wineskins, and so both are preserved.”* (Mt. 9:16-17)

The apostle Paul put it this way, *“Therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (I Cor. 5:17)

God wants to do something new in us, but first we have to let go of the old. We want God to change us a little, but God wants to transform our lives. In the Gospel of John, our conversion is called being *“born again.”* The only way we can prepare for such a new birth is by dying to an old way of life.

Peter said, *“Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”* (Acts 3:19)

What is it that you need to let go of in order to experience God’s newness in your life? What memories are there in your mind that need to be forgotten so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord?

In our passage from John’s account of the gospel, this morning we read of the extravagant worship performed by Mary, one of Jesus’ closest friends, together with Martha and Lazarus, who poured out a bottle of expensive perfume over Jesus’ feet. There seems to be a disconnect here between Isaiah and John. But if you look closely, you will see the primary answer to our problem of what to remember and what to forget. That answer is found in worship—when our primary direction of looking and remembering is focused on Jesus, the Christ.

In worship, we look away from ourselves—our sin and shame—and look towards the one who forgets our transgressions and leads us to new life. Repentance and worship go together. In fact, repentance is an integral part of worship. That’s why we include prayers of confession every time we gather together for worship. It is only when we repent, seek reconciliation with God and with one another, that we truly worship God and be open to the new thing God wants to do in us.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and praise. Amen.