

Remembering the Lord
Easter 2B 2021
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Acts 3:12–26, Psalm 111, 1 John 5:1–5, John 20:19–31

In today's Gospel reading, we encounter St. Thomas encountering the risen Lord. Upon beholding the hands and side of Jesus, Thomas declares, "My God and My Lord." This is the clearest confession of faith in the Gospels. After Thomas's grand confession of faith, Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Jesus is speaking to us. We have believed and we have not seen. Just because we have not seen the risen Lord, does not mean that we do not know Him. It does not mean that we do not encounter Him or behold Him. If we are expecting to see Jesus walk through the front door, we may be looking in the wrong direction.

Last week, I suggested that we encounter Jesus Christ, the Resurrected One by His Spirit. I talked about looking back, looking out, and looking in. I might also have said, "Looking forward." Jesus is calling us into the future. As I continued to reflect on our encounter with the Lord, I return to these ideas of looking back, looking out, looking in and looking forward.

Today, I would like to spend a bit more time on the theme of looking back. Remembering is such an important theme all through Scripture. The people of God are told to remember even as the Lord promises to remember His covenant promises. In one sense, all of Scripture is a memory of the people of God in ancient Israel and in the Apostolic church. Through these memories, these testimonies, the Spirit bears witness to us of the Risen Lord.

At the end of our Gospel passage this morning, John writes, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30–31). The Spirit of God works through these stories of Jesus to open our eyes and hearts to faith in Christ.

This morning, I want return to the theme of remembering the Scripture. I also want to consider the challenges of remembering our stories.

Remembering Scripture

In addition to our Gospel reading today, the lessons from Acts and the Psalm both speak of remembering the Lord.

Our lesson from Acts picks up in the middle of a story. Peter and John are walking to the Temple for prayer at the ninth hour, that is 3 pm: the hour of Christ's crucifixion. They heal a lame man who waits outside the Temple. This miraculous healing causes such commotion that a crowd

appears. The man clings to Peter and John. In the midst of the frenzy, Peter speaks to the crowd that has gathered. As He addresses the crowd, he interprets the healing event in light of Jesus Christ. He then connects the story of Jesus to the memories of ancient Israel: to the Patriarchs and to the prophets.

In verse 13, he says, “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.” (Acts 3:13). Peter makes the case that Jesus is the servant of the same Lord who was and is God of Israel, of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Jesus is the servant of the Lord.

The Old Testament is filled with references to the servant of the Lord. The Old Testament is filled with references to the “servant of the Lord” applied to leaders such as Moses, Joshua, and David. While the prophets also use this term, Isaiah uses this term in a special way to indicate a servant who is raised up to fulfill God’s plan for the earth. In passages such as Isaiah 42:1:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my Spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Isaiah has a series of servant passages that seem to point to a messianic servant who will restore Israel and bring about God’s purposes. At one point, this servant is even introduced as a suffering servant. Peter appears to be connecting Jesus with these passages. He is the long-awaited servant of the Lord: the Messiah.

He also refers to Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One, and finally, as the Author of Life.

Peter is interpreting the event of the cross in light of the story of Israel. Jesus is not only the servant of the Lord, he rules at the right hand of the God of Israel as the Holy and Righteous One. The people passed judgment on Jesus but actually Jesus is the judge before whom they must give an account.

Then Peter says that the people killed Jesus who is in fact the Author of Life. He offers two paradoxical statements in a row: the judge judges those who passed judgment on Him, and the Author of Life is not bound by death but raised to life again.

Peter points to the lame man made whole and says that Jesus has given this man perfect health. Then he turns to the prophets and says that God foretold through His prophets that Christ would suffer. Though the people cried out for his crucifixion, Peter is showing that this death was bigger than them for God had foreordained this event. In His death, Jesus has fulfilled the Father’s purpose of redeeming the world. Finally, Peter calls the people to repent and turn to Christ Jesus, so that their sins may be rooted out and times of refreshment may come from the

Presence of the Lord. This same Jesus who is the servant of the Lord, the Holy and Righteous One, and the Author of Life, will come to those who repent and by His Spirit will refresh them in His Presence. Finally, Peter suggests that in so doing, Jesus will fulfill the promise given to Abraham about blessing all families of the earth.

In one short sermon, Peter has reinterpreted the story of Israel in light of Christ and invited the people to encounter the presence of the Risen Lord by repenting of their sins.

This pattern of remembering the Scriptures, that is the stories of ancient Israel in light of Christ will be repeated in the New Testament letters and especially in the book of Hebrews. All these ancient stories, these ancient testimonies of God are memories that have been preserved by the Spirit to help the people of God believe in Jesus Christ, the servant of God, the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life.

This teaches us a pattern of reading the ancient stories of Israel and the Apostolic stories of the church together and all in light of Jesus Christ. By His Spirit, these stories not only bear witness to Christ, but open our hearts to the presence of Christ who stands before us even now.

I would hope that you might keep this in mind as you read Scripture, asking the Spirit to awaken your heart the Risen One who stands before you even now.

Remembering Stories

We are also learning how to remember stories rightly. Just as we interpret Scripture, we interpret our own lives in light of Christ. The ancient Israelites were rescued from slavery in the house of Pharaoh, but while crossing the wilderness they begin to remember the joys of Egypt and not the suffering. They must be reminded again and again of their deliverance from suffering and to promise. They struggled to remember rightly. We also struggle to remember rightly.

In his lectures, James Houston used to suggest that when you read a book or learn something new, you should try and share it with a few people. Soon this lesson will be fixed in your memory. I began doing that with books that I read and over time have continued to remember key, transformative ideas from those books. This makes it seem like I remember everything I've read, but actually I am only remembering a few things from each book.

I have not remembered other rich thoughts and meditations from those books. This means that I often reread books. I want to encounter those ideas that profoundly touched my life.

As I was thinking about remembering this week, I began to think about how I not only remember two or three ideas from a book, but I also tend to remember two or three things from the day. If I talk about two or three bad things that happened during the course of the day, I will tend to remember those bad things and possibly forget about all the treasures of the day, all the ways the risen Lord enriched my life that day.

In recent years, I've developed the habit of speaking of my 40s as a terrible decade. Then I recount all the bad things that happened to me in my 40s: I went through kidney failure; our church community building burned; I lost my job; my father died. Soon I only remembered my 40s as one calamity after another.

As I was considering this idea of learning how to rightly remember in light of Christ, I returned to the decade of my 40s. I tried to actively consider the ways Christ was present and at work in that period.

During that time I discovered a deep and close bond with a group of people as we learned life together in house church or a simple church. We eventually rented a building because of all the children, and this building became a source of community life for movie nights, luncheons, concerts, workshops, and much more. Everyone in the community had a key and the building was used all the time.

During this same period, I was writing more regularly than any period in my life. I was sending out reflections to a wide range of people, and I had the privilege of connecting with a wide range of people all over the world.

During this same period, I had the privilege of leading multiple retreats a year on topics like Celtic Christianity, prayer and meditation, the tradition of Holy Fools and much more.

During this same period, I forged some deep bonds with friends that continue to this day.

During this same period, I worked in the business world and had the opportunity to help create a variety of new community building elements on the company website. I even had the chance to share my vision at a national conference.

The more I thought about the decade of my 40s, the more I was overwhelmed with God's goodness and presence every step of the way. I was given a kidney transplant from a close friend; before my father died he was able to embrace us and speak a blessing over us; I met a group of Anglicans and ended becoming one.

God's grace met me every step of the way. Even as one season ended in job loss and a burned building, another season began with the Anglican church.

And yet, I had remembered it as a terrible decade. Look back over your days, over your weeks, and even over your years. Look for the surprise gifts of God that surrounded you each step of the way. He is and has been faithful in our journeys.

We might also do well to take time to actively remember the stories of God's people. I have begun the habit of remembering and celebrating those who enriched my life but are no longer here and have gone on to be with the Lord. I also try to read stories of saints ancient and recent.

Whether it is short one page reflections on the saint or longer, richer biographies. By looking back at those who live faithfully even in the midst of their struggles, I see afresh the Risen Lord who lights our way.