

REMEMBERING TOMORROW
HEBREWS 11:13-16, 39-40; 12:1-2

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1985

One weekend, when our youngest son, Craig, was about three years old, I was away, probably with the youth on a retreat. Ellie was putting Craig to bed and talking to him about his grandparents who lived some 2,000 miles away in Minnesota. She asked him, "Do you remember Grandma Ellen, Grandma Bea, Grandpa Ed?" running through the list of relatives in order to keep him in touch with his family. At one point he interrupted her and asked, "Do you remember Daddy?" I suppose I was often absent, as are many fathers.

Today is All Saints Sunday. All Saints Day occurs on November 1. The evening before All Saints Day is more familiar to us as it was called the Hallowed Eve and eventually became Halloween. As the saints are spirits, Halloween came to be associated with spooks and the like. On All Saints Sunday, we do not remember spooks or spirits, but our departed loved ones, saints of the church whom we memorialize, and the saints of church history. Let us remember the saints, not so that we might face backward and attempt to live in the past; but let us remember the saints in such a way that we might better live today and prepare for tomorrow.

The purpose of remembering is to hope. Hope is stronger than memory. Memory gives content to hope. We remember in order to hope. A provocative definition of hope is: Hope is remembering tomorrow. If you examine your own memories, you might find that those strongest memories are of times and experiences in which hope was fulfilled. The major religious traditions are about events which fulfilled hopes. Remembering those traditions gives hope for the future. The Passover in the Jewish tradition is a remembering of the exodus from Egyptian slavery. The remembering gives hope for freedom from all present oppressive situations.

The major Christian celebration of Easter is a remembering of Christ's victory over sin and death. The remembering gives content to our hope for the coming of God's kingdom and our own eternal life. Communion, a remembering of Jesus' last supper, is future oriented as we fellowship together until, in the words of the liturgy, "his coming again." Thanksgiving is an American remembering of the pilgrims who fulfilled their hope for a new start, a new beginning, a fresh land. Celebrating Thanksgiving as a nation points us to the future for anticipated new starts, new beginnings, for a nation in which everyone is given a chance. We celebrate past events in which people were looking forward. To hope is to remember tomorrow.

Therefore, we tell the stories of yesterday in order to remember tomorrow. We tell each other stories about the Bible, about the heroes and heroines--the saints--of church history. We tell our children and grandchildren the stories of our family. We tell each other stories about our church. Why? To establish roots in the present so that we can live today in confidence and set directions for the future. Tomorrow is built out of yesterdays, and the best of yesterday is what we want to claim for tomorrow.

Trevor Nunn expresses this philosophy beautifully in "Memory." He wrote:

Midnight. Not a sound from the pavement.
Has the moon lost her memory?
She is smiling alone.
In the lamplight the withered leaves collect at my feet
And the wind begins to moan.
Mem'ry. All alone in the moonlight
I can smile at the old days,
I was beautiful then.
I remember the time I knew what happiness was,
Let mem'ry live again....
Daylight. I must wait for the sunrise,
I must think of a new life
And I mustn't give in.
When the dawn comes tonight will be a memory too
And a new day will begin.

Let memory live again. A new day will begin. Andrew Lloyd Webber set this text to music. I have asked Leroy to sing it. This song is from Webber's musical, Cats. You may also remember that Webber composed Jesus Christ, Superstar and Evita. We have an exciting privilege. Webber has composed a Requiem, and the West Coast premier of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Requiem will be presented in this sanctuary on April 18 by our choir, the San Jose Symphonic Choir, and orchestra, under the direction of Leroy Kromm.

God is richly blessing our church. We have an excellent staff, committed and capable lay leadership, and a first-rate program with plans to continue improving. As we plan for the future, we remember in order to give content to tomorrow. Ernie Newlands shared with me the newsletter of this church dated March 18, 1962. At that time this sanctuary was in the process of being built. Listen to some of the comments from that 1962 newsletter.

The pastor, R. Marvin Stuart, said, "God has granted us the unique privilege of building a `cathedral.'"

George Knoles, Chairman of the Sanctuary and Chapel Committee, said, "Words fail to suggest the excitement we feel as our dreams begin to materialize in concrete and steel.... We eagerly await the day when we can worship in our new sanctuary, a visible embodiment of our faith."

Eileen Washington, Director of Music, said, "Not even the great cathedrals of Europe provide more splendid opportunities to worship God with music than our sanctuary will offer.... All of the most glorious music man has been able to create as a religious expression will have its perfect setting in our new sanctuary. We will have two organs with two consoles.... Future recording and TV equipment have been planned for.... It will be a mecca for musicians and artists far and wide. Festivals of religious music, drama, and art will unfold here."

J. Allen Walker, Chairman of the Executive Committee, said,
"God sends no churches from the skies;
Out of men's hearts they must arise."

Margaret Wiederhold, Administrator of Christian Education, said, "Our children are learning more about the Church year by year. They have studied its history in many ways. They are watching the process of building their own church, have seen the model many times, and have visited the construction area from time to time.... It is thrilling to see the undisguised excitement and anticipation of our wonderful children as we all build our church together."

Glen R. Murray, Director of Youth, said, "Our youth are not sitting idly awaiting the completion of the building, but are enthusiastically doing their part.... With the completion of the new building, and especially the Youth Lounge, we will be able to carry on a much more active and meaningful youth program. This will include regular recreational activities, a youth library, a more unified approach to our church school program, drama groups, youth fellowship meetings, and a central office for youth activities. Our ministry to youth can and will become a much more intense and vital program once we are in our new facilities."

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of Murray, the Director of Youth, all the persons quoted are still active members of our church. Their vision and the vision of the congregation when this sanctuary was built is still our vision. We are yet in the process of fulfilling the vision. To remember is to give content to the direction for the future. Hope is remembering tomorrow.

This morning's Scripture lesson is powerful in its imagery. The author of Hebrews lists heroes of the faith like Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, etc., then concludes (11:39), "And all these...did not receive what was promised." They did not see or enjoy the fruits of their labor. The hopes, dreams, and hard work of the saints--the saints of history, your family and our church--were not fulfilled. What they were building on this earth--namely, the kingdom of God--is yet in the future.

The author continues (11:40), "since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect." They need us to fulfill their dreams. By remembering the saints, we find direction for the future and content for our vision. We take what we have been given, develop and improve it, and pass it on to the next generation.

I'm afraid that, in many respects, our generation may not pass on to the next generation as rich a heritage as we have received. Our generation may be rightly accused of being self-centered and greedy. The San Francisco Chronicle published a series of sobering articles this past week on the ramifications of Proposition 13, the tax revolt. I wonder how Jarvis is able to sleep at night. We are handing to the next generation a California of deteriorating roads, weakened law enforcement agencies and, worst of all, a demoralized and impoverished public school system. We are stealing from our own children.

In Arizona a few years ago, I was with a group of retired people from the north--snowbirds, they are called--who were celebrating their victory. They had organized the snowbirds to defeat a school bond issue. Who, I wonder, educated their children back in Iowa and Minnesota? In one of my previous churches, I asked the questions, "What is God calling our church to be and do twenty years from now? And what decisions do we need to make today in order to build for tomorrow?" One of the pillars of the church answered, "Oh, I don't care. I won't be here then!"

Our generation has been handed an excellent school system, churches with edifices such as ours, a planet filled with natural resources, clean air and clean water. Will our generation hand to the next generation dirty air, dirty water, and a stockpile of nuclear weapons? Will that be our legacy? Remember tomorrow.

Let us also remember that we are not alone. We are in this together. The author of Hebrews gives us this gripping image in 12:1-2, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." The saints are all around us, cheering us on, encouraging us, waiting for us to continue their work. We say in the creed, "I believe in the communion of the saints." There is John Wesley, Martin Luther, Susan B. Anthony. There is Ruth Cross, who so deeply loved this church. There is John Bodley, urging us to Bible study, total abstinence, and evangelism. There is Jim Nute, who always gave and did his best that this church might prosper. There is faithful John Roberts with his smile and encouragement. There is Paul Bartholomew, ringing the bells. There is Homer Herbert, who greeted the strangers and welcomed them to this church. There is Edna Wallace with her love for all the babies.

What a heritage we have been given! What a privilege you and I have been given to be in the company of the saints and to help fulfill their dreams for God, his people, and his world. "Therefore," writes the author of Hebrews, "let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."

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