

Remember!

Psalm 66

July 8, 2007

I remember ...

I remember hiking up Mount Wilson with my father. It was a steep climb, on a hot southern California day. I was eleven or twelve, so proud to be taking on this challenge with my Dad, so proud to make it to the top! He showed me how to put a pebble in my mouth to draw saliva and ease my thirst. When we got to the top, to the observation station there, I was so thirsty, I drank two sodas. I had never drunk two sodas in a row before!

I remember getting up before dawn to drive out to a forest preserve near East Lansing, Michigan, to go birding with my Dad. We took binoculars and a bird book. We identified the birds by their songs and tried to find them with the binoculars and made lists of the birds we identified.

I remember camping out as a teen on a sandy Lake Huron beach. We were a group of maybe ten or twelve teens and a couple of young adult leaders. We slept in sleeping bags on the sand under the stars, and I remember eagerly offering my windbreaker to a young blond girl to use for a pillow. I was thrilled when Lynne said she would use my windbreaker!

I remember watching that same young girl from a distance when she was older, walking up the path to the lodge on the point at Cedar Campus, just watching the way she walked, carefree and confident. And I remember seeing her in a white dress as she turned the corner to come up the aisle of the meeting house at the camp, escorted by her Dad, the most beautiful bride there ever was!

Some things you never forget ...

I remember seeing a man, a man named Jesus, riding a donkey through the city gate. Excited people were clamoring and shouting all around him, wanting to acclaim him king on the spot, but he just sat on that donkey looking at them. His own demeanor gave them their answer: his way would be a different way.

I remember watching that same man, Jesus, talk with a woman by a well in Samaria. He listened to her and gave her his attention, even though she was a woman and even though she was of a different race. He answered her questions and offered her ... eternal life!

I remember him meeting some of his friends around a campfire on the beach, offering them fish. I remember him turning to one of them, Peter, and asking him, *Do you love me?* I remember that he had been killed, executed by the provincial governor, but now he was here, alive, eating with them, offering fish ... and forgiveness.

I remember him breaking bread and saying, *This is my body ...*

But wait a minute, you say, you can't possibly remember those things! You weren't there! All those things happened hundreds and hundreds of years before your time!

No, I wasn't there, but we were! We were there! There are personal memories and there are collective memories, stories that we remember and pass on as a people, as a community, stories that we tell and retell because they must not be forgotten, because they are the stories that tell us who we are and to whom we belong and what we are for.

Psalm 66 is a song of collective memory.

*Praise God with shouts of joy, all people!
Come and see what God has done,
his wonderful acts among people ...
He changed the seas into dry land ...*

He changed the seas into dry land ... To what event does the psalm writer refer? The crossing of the Red Sea during the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt, an event that happened hundreds of years before this psalm of praise was written.

*Our ancestors crossed the river on foot.
There we rejoiced because of what God did.*

They crossed the river, but we rejoiced! It happened to them, but we remember. And why is it important for us to remember, hundreds of years after the fact? Because the God who helped them, the God who protected them, the God who delivered them from their enemies, the God who gave them life and liberty is the same God today. The God of the exodus is the God of the psalmist ... and our God, too.

The psalm writer reflects the trouble and turmoil and terrors of his own day.

*you have put us to the test ...
you placed heavy burdens on our backs ...
you let our enemies trample us ...
we went through fire and flood ...*

Like their ancestors, they face powerful enemies, they suffer under onerous circumstances, they often find themselves in situations of great peril. But like their ancestors, they have a God who defends them and brings them through the valley of the shadow to a place of safety. That's why they tell and retell the stories, so they will not forget. So they will remember. So they will remember who they are and to whom they belong and what they are for, and take courage.

Remember! And take courage!

You live in an increasingly terrifying world. Physicians are planting bombs in London. Al-Zawahiri urges a holy war against the West and says *the wind is blowing against Washington*. Disease and climate change and environmental toxins and diminishing resources threaten the continued existence of human life as we know it.

But don't be afraid! Remember! God is your protector! God is your defender! God will bring you through to a place of safety.

You may be feeling squeezed financially or face an uncertain job future or wonder whether you can make ends meet in retirement. But don't be anxious! Remember! God will provide! God will give you your daily bread.

You may be struggling with guilt or with failure or with feelings of inadequacy. You may have made real mistakes and done real hurt -- to yourself or to another person or to God. But don't be beaten down by shame! Remember! God is merciful and loving and full of grace! God will forgive you when you confess your sin and will guide you in the right way.

You may be happy and content with your life, with your way of life. You may have all you need and most of what you want. You may give hardly a thought to those who suffer and struggle just to survive, half a world away or even on the other side of the street. But don't be indifferent to their pain! Remember! God is a God of justice! God takes the side of the poor and the oppressed and the widow and the alien.

You may find them unlovable -- whoever "them" is. You may find yourself unlovable, which is a terrible state to be in since you have to live with yourself! You may find much of contemporary culture shallow and tasteless and unhealthy and unlovable. But don't be quick to judge! Remember! God is love! God loves the world -- so much! God loves the world and all the creatures that fill it, including "them," including you, including Jerry Springer and Paris Hilton and Rupert Murdoch and Sam Walton.

It is so easy to forget ... But remember! Remember who you are and to whom you belong and what you are for. When things come to terrify you or distract you or pull you down, remember! Remember not just your own history, your own stories, your own experience, but our history, our stories, our experiences. Because our God, the psalm writer's God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is your God, too! Remember!