

The Reverend Patrice Fowler-Searcy
East Liberty Presbyterian Church
July 25, 2010
Joshua 24:1-15
“Remember Not to Forget”

Memories. . . our lives are full of them. I know people who have memories of their toddler years, and then there are those who can't remember what happened yesterday. We have memories of things that occurred in our lives as individuals. . . some of our first accomplishments, riding a bike on our own, graduating from high school or college; landing our first job or achieving a career goal; the first time we met that special someone and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that we would spend the rest of our lives with them; memories of when we came to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior or our first communion. And then there are memories that we share. . . a couple's memories of their first kiss and wedding day; parents' memories of their child's birth, first steps or words or the day their child became an adult and moved to their first home; memories siblings share of parents who loved, protected and provided for them, but are no longer here.

We mark the times of our lives with our memories. There are memories we will never forget, because they were life-changing; there are memories we hope to forget because they were life-changing. Yes, we all have memories.

In today's scripture passage, Joshua and the Israelites have finally arrived in the Promised Land and are settling in. We are told in the 11th chapter that “Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments.” As instructed by God, Joshua divided the land and assigned specific areas to each of the tribes of Israel, but after doing so one last thing remained to be done. Joshua called the tribes together to remind them of where they had come from and all that they had endured, and more importantly to remind them of who had been with them all the way, who had made a way out of no way, who had opened doors that were closed and who had defeated the enemies that blocked their path. Joshua wanted to make sure the Israelites always remembered not to forget that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, whose promises had been fulfilled. Promises to prosper them and do them no harm.

The Israelites were under the divine initiative of God all the way from bondage to the promise. . . and so are we.

Joshua wanted to ensure that the Israelites remembered not to forget God's providence. Divine intervention is evident throughout Israel's history. It was this God who took Abraham and his descendents out of the land where idols and gods of no consequence were worshipped. This God gave Israel spiritual advocates, leaders and guides in Moses and Joshua; and it was this God who had promised to not leave or forsake the Israelites, but lead them into the all righteousness.

God is divinely intervening in our lives today. We can all attest to times when it seemed as if doors were closed; we didn't know which way to turn and situations were overwhelming. It doesn't matter how young or old, rich or poor, or what color you may be; we have all had those experiences. . . a class we thought we would fail, the bills that we weren't sure would be paid, the retirement account that wasn't adequate, discrimination of every kind: racial, ethnic, economic, sexual orientation. You name it, discrimination was and yet still is prevalent in our country and results in people not being treated as equals. Remember not to forget that God is still in control and we are reminded by scripture that our God is able to take even the disappointments and tragedies in our lives and work them out for our good. When we live in the divine will of God, a closed door just means that God has a bigger blessing behind the next one, or is preparing to open a window and shower out blessings that we can not conceive.

Joshua reminded the Israelites that they had been under God's protection. It was God who made it possible for the Israelites to win battles against their enemies when the odds were against them. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, ultimately resulting in the Israelites leaving Egypt with riches; God led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years; God fought their battles against the many kings and kingdoms and enabled them to secure the Promised Land.

And brothers and sisters, it is this same God who is protecting and helping us overcome those sins, distractions, addictions, and influences that so easily beset us today. Remember not to forget that God is not only able, but God will fight our battles, both those from without and those from within. Kings and kingdoms shall all pass away, but remember not to forget, that God is eternal, has no beginning and no end. With God all things are impossible.

Joshua reminds Israel; to remember not to forget that it was God who provided for them—who sent Moses to free them, provided water and manna in the wilderness and gave them land on which they had not labored, enabled them to live in houses they had not built, and to eat food they did not plant or grow.

Joshua reminded Israel and us to remember not to forget that God is our provider. When we take time to look back over our lives, we can see the provision of God in every step along the way: God who softened someone's heart and they provided a roof over our heads when we were homeless, a meal when we were hungry, a job opportunity that we were unqualified for, resources to attend a school financially out of our reach, and to provide for our families when the economy took a downward turn. God's mercies are new each and every morning, without limit and given freely to all.

Joshua finally declares that as people in a covenant relationship with God, the Israelites had a choice to make—a choice to serve the God of providence, protection and provision. He reminded them to remember not to forget that God offers the choice freely. The choice to serve those gods that held us in bondage, couldn't provide a way

out, did not lead or guide, who didn't protect us from all harm or to serve the only true and living God.

Remember not to forget that the only way to faithfully serve God is with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Remember not to forget that it's not about us, but to love and serve our neighbors unconditionally, without seeking anything in return.

Remember not to forget we have the gift of making the choice to demand equality and justice for all; the choice to speak for those who have no voice or for those who have been silenced; the choice to serve those who are in need; and the choice to show forth God's love to those who are ill, ostracized, grieving or in despair.

Remember not to forget that while we were still in sin, God loved, protected and provided for us; sent Jesus as our Saviour and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as our comforter and sustainer.

Remember not to forget to show God reverence with sincerity of heart, in truth and with thanksgiving, and to make the choice this day and each and everyday that as for me and my house we will serve the God of our salvation! Beloved, I beseech you today, remember not to forget!

AMEN