

## SIGNPOSTS SERIES – NO 2

### CHRISTIAN MEMORY

**Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 10 September 2006**

**Psalm 139:12-18; Acts 17:24-28; John 20:30-31; John 21:25**

\*[Series based upon the book of the same title, by Trevor Hudson]

Begin with asking the congregation to ‘brainstorm’: What comes to mind, when you hear the words “remember” and “memory”? (Quick, not long or philosophical)

- Easy to remember
- “Forgettery”
- Systems of remembering
- Brain activity
- The past
- Remembrance of important people and events
- Shaped by the past
- Thankfulness / Painful memories
- Both words have “me” in it – to do with memories in connection with my life
- Jesus: Do this in remembrance...

Remembering is potentially a crucial part in the life of faith in God. Last week, in the first sermon in this series, it was emphasised that our understanding of God is crucial, and that in fact, our picture of God profoundly shapes the way we live.

As we mature in life, and as we mature in faith, our vision of God develops, but Trevor Hudson, in his book upon which this series is closely based, makes the point that development of a Christian memory is also crucial. What does he mean by “Christian memory”? Is he talking, like some of these people on commercial TV, of some magical memory system that will supposedly have you never forgetting another thing in your life? Absolutely not!

#### **Remember:**

A Rabbi is quoted as saying that “Much of what the Bible demands can be comprised in one word, ‘Remember’.”

“But, do I hear you protest, why dwell on the past? ...Is not remembering a time-wasting activity that actually limits (us)? It is not more important to forget the past, live in the present and plan for the future?” (Hudson, p33)

“A friend of mine would strongly disagree. Recently he described an evening out with his wife. It was their seventh wedding anniversary and, celebrating the occasion with an act of reckless generosity, he took his wife to a rather exclusive French restaurant.

Lingering over their candlelit supper they were able to talk together, uninterruptedly and leisurely, for over three hours. Aware that their relationship had felt the strains of parenting three young children, lack of quality time together and the demands of conflicting work schedules, I expressed the hope that it had been a renewing time for them both. My friend's response intrigued me. 'Yes, we spent the evening remembering... we shared memories of our relationship together, joyful and painful...And you know, it's been a long time since I have felt so grateful and close in my marriage'." (Hudson, pp33-34)

This is what happens when we take time to look at our memories. We enter a journey of recollections of experiences and emotions, of new perspectives, and open up to a renewed vitality. Biblical writers affirm this journey. "Engraved upon their hearts was the conviction that God had made his loving presence known in their own history." Children were brought up on the collective memories of their community. This is what Jewish people still do when gathering on Friday night for family prayers, and especially when celebrating important feast such as Passover. The activity of God in the past, was made real within the present. They were people of the Covenant, and their worship reaffirmed this historical covenant.

And the early Christian community met in the same way – many of the earliest disciples and converts being Jewish. (Elaborate on Sabbath meal / family prayer experiences within Jewish community; relate to Christian community celebrating Eucharist, also remembering what Jesus did for us.)

The first Christian communities met together to hear God's word (the collective, inspired writings and teachings of the law, and of the words and deeds of Jesus), which reaffirmed what God had done in history, and to receive teaching based upon this, and then to break bread together in remembrance of Jesus as he commanded them, on the occasion of the Passover meal shared with the Twelve on the night before he died.

### **Remembering Jesus in the Gospels**

Hudson writes that as a pastor he "meets people who, while they may be tired of religion, yearn for a first-hand relationship with the Holy One" (pp35-36).

We are reminded that the Gospels are written for this purpose, that we may encounter Jesus, and through him know the character and nature of God. Hence John wrote (as per today's Gospel reading):

**John 20:30-31 and also 21:25** – the purpose for which these things were written; "These are written so that you may know that Jesus is the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name."

We can come to know God and deepen our friendship with God, by keeping company with Jesus as found in the Gospels.

It is suggested – and I want to encourage you to do this in the week ahead – that we take one of the four Gospels and read it through, if possible in one sitting (it is not really that long), otherwise more spread out, but in one reading instead of the usual few verses or even one chapter at a time. That will give us a broad sweep of the life and teachings of Jesus. The Gospel according to Mark is a good place to start, it is the shortest and also probably the earliest. Matthew and Luke were likely based upon Mark or the same sources, and the Gospel according to John is different entirely in its approach and therefore also worth a read.

“As we follow Jesus through the pages of the gospels we are reminded of what God is like and how we can live in partnership with him. Upon this memory the Holy Spirit acts, causing Jesus to become for us a living presence and making us mindful of his wishes for our daily lives.” (Hudson p36)

“That is why a precise understanding of Jesus is so important for us, so we can share His vision of God and His understanding of human nature and frame for ourselves our own relationship with God...” (Joseph Girzone, in Hudson, pp36-37)

### **Remembering our personal stories**

- Acts 17:28 “In him we live and move and have our being”
- Psalm 139

Remembering – and looking back – and noting God’s presence in all of our lives, from conception onwards. This is not a cold, computer-generated memory, or even the memory of a faded photograph (as evocative as that can be). It is also a matter of soaking our hearts in faith, of seeing that God has always been with us even when we have been unaware of God’s presence. Powerful imagery in Ps 139, of God seeing us and knowing us even as we were being formed in our mother’s womb; even at a time when we were incapable of knowing anything about God, God was aware of us!

### **Exercise in “spiritual autobiography”**

It is suggested that we engage in a process of a “spiritual autobiography”, whether in thought alone, or committed to words in writing. (Elaborate on each phase; not necessarily a lengthy process, but one of remembering our pasts, with the intention of being aware of times when we were aware of God, also of times that were painful or when we may not have been aware of God, but now looking back and re-visioning God being with us and a part of those experiences.)

Stage 1: Key moments when God seemed close / you were aware of God

Stage 2: We all have our own “Pool of tears” next to us – hurtful / painful memories

Stage 3: Times and places when we were able to bring light and hope to others

Developing our memory, in which we remember our experience of Christ in our lives, is another signpost on our journey of faith. It may also make us more sensitive to God here-and-now, and more willing and able to see ourselves as instruments for God's service now and in the future.

This is an experience of "holy remembering". Our experience of God is enriched, for as we notice how God has been with us in the past, our experience of God's companionship with us in the present is deepened.

SERMON ENDS

**Collect used on this Sunday:**

Almighty God

We are eternally thankful for the grace and hope given to us

Through the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus.

We ask you assist us by the grace of your Spirit

That we may never forget your goodness to us

And that we may show our thankfulness

Not only in words

But by the service of our lives,

Now and for eternity

Amen

ENDS