

“Remember When ...?”

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” 1 John 3:1a.

“Remember when ...?” In the Sheaffer household, this phrase brings us quite a chuckle. Years ago, when my parents, brother and I were visiting my grandma and uncle we had an evening where the four of us took a long trip down memory lane. It was one of those times when one memory would spark another memory and things just continued to snowball from there. If you hear my parents or brother tell the story, the real reason our conversation got so long was because I kept coming up with random memory after random memory. According to them, our conversation became quickly one-sided as they would just listen and chuckle as memories would pop into my mind and out of my mouth like popcorn in a microwave.

While you probably had to be there to get the full, humorous effect, I share this brief family tale because I was reminded of it from the staff devotion we had this past week. Every Tuesday at our staff meetings, a member of the staff leads us in a devotion. And one of the things this week’s devotion highlighted was remembering. This is how the devotion began, “When old friends, long separated by time, get together, they give their brains a rigorous workout. It’s amazing how much you can remember about stuff that you thought you had long forgotten. One shared memory easily ignites a string of memories.”

As you hear from these words, this chain of remembering is something that all of us likely get to experience in our lives, whether it’s with friends or family. I would even go as far as to say that this is something we get to do as a church family each week as we gather here in this place for worship. And there aren’t many weekends that serve as well as an opportunity to remember together than this weekend in the church year as we observe All Saints’ Day. As some of you might recognize, this weekend when we observe All Saints’ Day, we remember God’s faithfulness to those who have gone before especially in this last year.

Perhaps you already noticed the list of names of those connected to Emmanuel who died this past year and later in this service you’ll even hear their names read. As we recognize these people, there’s no doubt that these names will lead you to remember either certain things about them or certain things about others who come to mind who have died. I think all of us will try as best as we can to remember those people on this list or those others that come to mind in the most positive light possible. While we may want to do this, the difficult reality is that the personal brokenness that is still connected to those individuals closest to us who have died before us, may make it a struggle to remember them in the best possible light.

This struggle is one reason why All Saints’ weekend is such an emotional time. We, as those left behind, are caught in a tension of reconciling with the past so that we can function in the present and somehow look forward to the future. On a day of remembering such as this, it is tempting to simply try and ignore the brokenness we still experience and feel. We want to remember and hold onto those best and happiest memories hoping that they’ll be enough to cover up the heavy weight of the leftover brokenness in our own lives. Though this technique may work for a few moments, as the days, weeks and months roll on this tool becomes quite limited. Only remembering people according to their own deeds ultimately leaves us with memories that fade away sometimes faster than we’d ever like to admit.

That is why we don’t simply gather in this place to only remember people according to their own deeds. Today, we come to together to remember the deeds of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Jesus’ deeds, unlike any other person’s deeds, don’t fade in the face of eternity. Jesus’ deeds are what cover the people on our All Saints’ list this year and yes, even now, it’s His deeds that cover us. This is what our each of our readings this weekend proclaims to us, that those who have gone before us in the faith and yes, even we, ourselves as we journey on in faith in Christ, are remembered by our God for all of eternity because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

This is why the greatest identifying mark of the multitude in Revelation, isn't their deeds, earthly language or ethnic backgrounds but rather their white robes that have been made white having been washed in the blood of the Lamb. You see, this heavenly congregation is remembered by the works of Jesus – works that pack tremendous eternal impact! It's this washing work of Jesus, baptism, that we remember for those on our All Saints' list this weekend.

And it's this washing work of Jesus, baptism, that we remember even for ourselves this weekend. For God's own work in our own lives through baptism, may be a past action, but it has present and ongoing effect tangibly connecting us to future life with Jesus when He returns. This is the kind of love our second reading is leading us to remember! God our Father has made us His children now, here in this moment, and that reality is most clearly shown by His work in our baptism as He connects us to His Son, to Jesus', life, death and resurrection. In this washing Jesus, cleanses and forgives us our sin and gives us what is His, the right to be called children of God.

And as God's children, we are connected to the One who is our source of blessing even in the midst of all the brokenness this side of heaven. For in our spiritual poverty, in our mourning, in our meekness, in our hunger and thirst for righteousness, in our actions of mercy, in our actions of purity, in our actions of peace, in moments of persecution, we fall back on Jesus who endured, suffered and conquered all of life's brokenness for our sake. Yes, even in these moments of brokenness, we remember God's ongoing work in our lives through Jesus for He is our guarantee of promised, future blessings.

So today, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we remember those who have gone before us in faith not merely by their own actions but even more so by Jesus' actions in their stead. Likewise, we remember ourselves not according to our past sins, those failures and regrets, rather we remember ourselves as God's children whose sins are covered and paid for by Jesus' righteous actions. We remember God's ongoing work in our own lives as we continue to hear His promises spoken at church and at home, when we forgive understanding that Jesus died for the whole world too, when we remember people first according to Christ and His work and not first according to their challenges, struggles, failures, oddities or brokenness.

Friends in Christ, being remembered according to Jesus' Words and Works changes us and changes how we look at and live with others. And so, I leave you with words that capture this life-changing truth from the same devotion I mentioned earlier, "Life in Christ has never been about our works. It's always been about remembering His. Trying to measure whether or not what we are doing is enough is anti-remembering. It is forgetting that God is enough, by trying to add to his enough. Remembrance is a loaded word, but every sacrament and every word of Scripture points to it.

Remembering is the embodiment of life with God. When we ask ourselves, are we depending on God enough? Are we abiding in Him? How do we live as a Christian? The answer always leads back to 'remember'. Our personal stories are interwoven into God's perfect plan of salvation through Jesus. Parts of our stories are rugged, and some are very sweet. In all of it, we remember TOGETHER and remind one another of the hope and promises we share in Jesus. We are remembered by him, written in his Book of Life, where we can never be forgotten."ⁱ Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan

ⁱ The devotion quoted in this sermon was given by Sarah Pennekamp and used with her permission. This devotion quotes portions from Gretchen Ronnevik's "Ragged" and Edward Grube's "Remembering Together" (LEA devotions 2022). You can find the full devotion online in Emmanuel's sermon section or at this link: <https://files.snappages.site/2KWHQF/assets/files/Devotion-Remembering-Together.pdf>