

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

Selective Memory

March 1, 2009

Genesis 9:8-17

1 Peter 3:18-22

Psalm 25:1-10

“Be mindful of your mercy and love, O God... do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions.”

By

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Pastor

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“Be mindful of your mercy and love, O God... do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions.”

Prayer: Please be mindful of us, O God, as we listen to and seek to understand your word to us. Amen.

Sometimes I thank God for the remote control for the TV set. Do you? We have the ability to pick and choose what news we let into our lives, into our consciousness. We can simply switch channels when we get tired of hearing the bad news that constantly comes into our living rooms... like last week when we heard word that an eleven year old child who was accused of killing his father's pregnant fiancée and the baby because he was jealous of her. He was told he would be tried as an adult. I started listening to that story and was appalled. So, I switched the channel.

So I started looking on the internet, for a nice G-rated story. Thought I found one when I ran across this so-called Good Samaritan story about a bus driver in Denver, CO. On a snowy evening, Friday night a week ago, this bus driver watched two old ladies get off his bus and start to cross the street. They were moving slowly but in the direct path of an oncoming pickup truck. In the interest of safety, the bus driver quickly got out and, together with another passenger, got these ladies across the street only to have himself hit by the pickup truck! The bus driver suffered bleeding in the brain, broken bones, a dislocated shoulder and a possible ruptured spleen. He was unconscious, in serious, but stable condition on Wednesday in intensive care. When he woke up, he found out that the Colorado State Patrol issued him a citation for jaywalking! The CSP said that despite the bus driver's intentions, his jaywalking contributed to the acci-

dent .(<http://www.news.aol.com/nationalnews/crimestories>, retrieved February 27, 2009). Are you kidding me? I can hardly believe it! That's a strange reward for a good deed. I clicked off the story with my computer mouse. Whether it's the remote control or the computer mouse, we can simply move past the bad news we hear all the time.

But, I presume God doesn't have that option of clicking off bad news. I presume God experiences all of our human weaknesses and our wickedness. God is a witness to it all. How God puts up with it, I don't know. Genesis indicates that at one point, God basically said , "I've had enough! I can't stand the wickedness of humanity any longer!" Genesis 6:6 tells us that "God was sorry that he made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." So, God made plans to start over by flooding out the earth.

Our Sunday School lessons for our kids depicted this as a cheery, G-rated story. They might sing the song, "The Lord said to Noah, there's going to be a floody, floody... get those children out of the muddy... Noah, he built him, he built him an arky, arky... made it out of hickory barky, barky (or gopher barky, barky)."

But, we might considered it anything but cheery. The corruption of humanity was all over the land. Wickedness had permeated into every aspect of human living. Death was everywhere. According to Genesis, God had had it, there were graphic images of violence as the flood came, and Noah was the only one with his sons left to start over.

That is what God wanted Noah to do. Start over. God had not given up all hope because God made a covenant of life, not death, with Noah. And even though, the human race still had the seeds of wickedness within, God promised to never again destroy the earth or humans with a flood. God said essentially, "I am going to hang up my bow in the sky [the word for 'bow' in Hebrew refers to the kind of bow that shoots arrows], but this bow will be empty of arrows." In other

words, God is saying, “I will never use it again to visit terror upon you. I am more sick of violence than anyone, so I will be the first to lay down my arms. There will be times when you and those who follow will disappoint me, and I may be tempted to send another flood, but this bow in the sky will remind me of what I am saying to you now” (Copenhaver, Martin, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=1799>, retrieved February, 27, 2009).

I say, “Thanks be to God for that covenant!” Lord knows that if God were to forget that covenant, in light of human wickedness and corruption, we might be in serious trouble. The psalmist says in Psalm 130: 3, “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand” (Psalm 130:3)? He’s right! Human nature is what it is... imperfect, frail, prone to sinfulness, prone to violence, prone to vengeful behavior, easily committing transgressions, loving deceit, self, and many other things other than God.

But God is reminded of the covenant that God made long ago—when the bow is in the sky, it reminds God of God’s forgiving nature and saving grace. Even if we think of the bow as a rainbow, it still is a wonderful metaphor symbolizing God’s promise.

For us as Christians, we believe God has another reminder. As I said, human nature is what it is... imperfect, frail, prone to sinfulness, prone to violence and vengeful behavior, easily committing transgressions, loving deceit, self, and many other things other than God. God looks at us and can see and experience all of our weakness. But then, God looks at Jesus and knows that he suffered and died for all. He was an example of how far one person so filled with God’s presence would go to show the reality of God’s covenant of love. “This love of Jesus saves us. It is the love that would rather die on the cross than give up on us” (Bell, Daniel, “God Does Not Demand Blood,” *The Christian Century*, Vol. 126, No. 3, February 10, 2009, p. 26).

I say, "Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ!" Thank God that God remembers the covenant. Thank God that God remembers the obedience of Jesus who went to the cross for us. Thanks be to God that God forgets our mistakes, the times and places we get off the track. Thanks be to God that God has selective memory, forgetting our sins and remembering the promise of forgiveness!

One of my favorite stories I've shared on many occasions, but I share again because it underscores God's selective memory. Many years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in a continuing education event whose keynote speaker was the late M. Scott Peck, author of The Road Less Traveled, People of the Lie, The Different Drum, and several other works. Dr. Peck told the story of a small girl in Manila, in the Philippines. She told her parents one day that she and God, on a daily basis, have these long conversations and dialogue. Now the parents were devout Catholics, and they told their local priest about their daughter. The priest shared the story to his bishop who told it to the Archbishop of the Philippines. The Archbishop wanted this phenomenon to be recorded as an official miracle in the church, as the Catholic church is wont to do. But, the Archbishop had to make sure this wasn't a hoax. So, he came to visit the little girl, and upon meeting her said, "I understand you've been talking with God." "Yes," she said. "Well, that's a pretty important thing," he said. "I'd like to make sure that it is true. Would you be willing to help me know that it's true?" "Yes," she said. "OK. What I want to do is tonight, when I am ready to go to bed, I will pray to God, and I will tell God all the mistakes I made during the day. Then, tomorrow, when you talk with God, would you please ask God to tell you what I said were my sins? Would you be willing to do that?" The girl said that she would. So, the Archbishop prayed to God and listed all his sins for the day. The next day, the Archbishop returned to the little girl and asked, "Did you talk with God today?" "Yes." "Good. Did you ask God what my sins were yesterday?" "Yes." "Well, what did God say?" She said, "God just laughed and said, 'I forget!'"

How about that! God said "I forget!" God forgets our sins, but God never for-

gets to love! Isn't that fantastic news? God has selective memory! God remembers covenant through the bow and saving grace through Jesus while forgetting our human sinfulness and foregoing any consequential response to it.

I hope and pray that our awareness of God's selective memory helps us realize that God desires life for everyone. As we receive that life, we can let it touch our inner lives so powerfully that we follow in God's way by having our own selective memory. We are encouraged to forgive because we remember that we were first forgiven. We are encouraged to forget our propensity for revenge or judgment or vengeance. When God gets inside us and we are changed into new creations filled with Christ's spirit, we can start to follow God's pathways and decrees. We can mirror God's actions and give second thoughts to practices that are not in keeping with God's ways.

I'm very glad to say that after I read the story about the injured bus driver receiving a jaywalking citation, that when I clicked away from that story, I went to a follow-up story posted right at that moment. This story said that the "Colorado State Patrol is reconsidering the jaywalking ticket issued to a good Samaritan who was seriously injured by a pickup after he pushed three people out of its path. The CSP said Thursday it is re-examining the investigation and reviewing the tickets with prosecutors" (<http://news.aol.com/article/colo-reconsiders-ticket-issued-to-good/361660>, retrieved February 27, 2009).

Thanks be to God! O God, be mindful of your mercy and love... do not remember the sins of our youth or our transgressions. May your selective memory be ours as we praise you for your love, your forgiveness, your saving grace. Amen.

Let us stand and sing.