

2020: The Global Year of the Bible
A Lamp and a Light, Part 8
Rev. Meagan Boozer

What do you do to remind yourself to do something? How do you remember? I am a list-maker. If it is not on my list, it has (maybe) a 50/50 chance of getting done. If someone tells me something I should do that I know is not on my list, I send a text to myself so I can put it on my list of things to do. The 'list' is like my always thinking, often distracted brain on paper in an organized manner. What do you do to remind yourself to do something? How do you remember special days that you want to celebrate or acknowledge in some important way?

Throughout the Bible we can see that God wants his people to remember Him, to remember what they've been through and how He got them to where they are today. In Deuteronomy 8, which is where we left off last week, God is calling His people to remember before they go into the land He promised. Let's take a look:

*8 "Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. Then you will live and multiply, and you will enter and occupy the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors. ²**Remember** how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. ³Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴For all these forty years your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't blister or swell ... Beware that in your plenty you **do not forget** the Lord your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. ⁵For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, ⁶and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! ⁷**Do not become proud at that time and forget** the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. ⁸**Do not forget** that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! ⁹He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. ¹⁰He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.' ¹¹**Remember** the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath."*

As a way of remembering, he gave them commands to organize festivals for the people.

- The Festival of Unleavened Bread (the Passover) as a way of remembering God's protection over them when they put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and their rescue from slavery in Egypt by God's mighty and merciful hand.
- The Festival of Harvest was a time that they brought their first crops of the harvest to the LORD as a reminder that it is God who gives us the land, the resources, the rain, the sun, and the crops – therefore he always gets our first and best crop.
- The Festival of Shelters (or Booths) was celebrated to remind the nation of Israel how their sin and disobedience kept them out of the promised land for 40 years. It was meant to humble them, reminding them how they built temporary shelters for themselves while in the wilderness for those 40 years, remembering how God himself was their shelter and protection.

All of the commands that were given were put in place to remind the people of how they were to treat God and treat one another. The number 613 is often cited as the number of commandments in the Old Testament Law, but some are repeated in different books. Just think about having to remember approximately 600 commandments in order to live as God called you

to live in community with your people. "In community" with your people. Let me say that one more time: "In community with your people."

The commandments in the Mosaic Law (all the commandments we are reading that came through Moses) were given to show the nation of Israel how to be God's holy nation. They weren't so much about individual behavior for the sake of the individual, they were more about individual behavior for the sake of the whole nation – a nation that God chose and set apart to be his representatives in the world. So it is not surprising when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment that he replied (Matthew 22:34-30), "*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" Of all the commandments given, the ultimate goal is to love God and love one another.

How are we to **remember** that? In our time, in 2020, what are we given to remember what God has done for us in Jesus Christ who for us is the fulfillment of the Law? The Jewish people still today have their times, seasons, or festivals of remembrance. Their Pesach (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Passover) begins this year on April 9 and lasts through the 16th. That is of course during our Holy Week because remember that Jesus was gathering with his disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover the night before he was crucified. The Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) happens this year on May 29 & 30 – which is a remembrance of God giving the 10 commandments to the Israelite nation on Mt. Sinai. The Shavuot coincides with our celebration of Pentecost, when 3000 people came to faith in Jesus Christ, the Law fulfiller, all on the same day! As followers of Jesus, what are we given to **remember** what God has done for us?

First of all, we are given God's Word. We believe that the Bible is a revelatory Word – meaning the Bible is not just a book of words giving us information about God. The Bible is a book through which God reveals himself, his power, his character, his purposes, and his love to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. We believe the Bible is a revelatory Word – revealing God in written Word and the Word made flesh in Jesus to his people, and reminding us as we read it of who He is and who we are in relation to Him and to one another.

Secondly, what are we given to help us remember God and all he has done for us? First, God's revelatory Word! Second, the Holy Spirit! When we say 'yes' to Jesus, when we put our faith in him as the only one who saves us from our sins and brings us into a place of peace with God, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us. And what did Jesus say about the Holy Spirit? He said that one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of all that he taught us. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate reminder of what God has done for us in Christ! The Holy Spirit is better than my old list any day because more important than remembering the stuff I'm supposed to do is remembering who God has made me to be, and how Jesus took me out of the miry pit and set my feet upon the rock of faith! How about you? Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit within us to help us be constant rememberers of God's grace in our lives.

Next, we are given the gift of the Church – the living Body of Christ on earth until he comes again. Let's be simplistically clear: The Church is not a building we come to. The Church is not a place we sit for an hour a week. The Church cannot be described by an address. The Church is a movement, friends. The Church is a Christ-centered, Holy Spirit empowered movement of people whose goal is to reveal the love of God for the world by the way we love Him and the way we love one another in Jesus' name. We are part of a movement that started with Jesus and expanded to his 12 disciples, grew to 120 that we read about in Acts 1 and by the end of the first sermon given by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) grew by 3000 souls. That's 2500% growth! Let's make it more real. If we have 200 people here today at UPVPC that are believers in Jesus, if we had 2500% growth, at the end of the day we would have 5,000 new believers among us. Historians estimate that Christianity grew by 40% per decade for the first 3 centuries. The total population of Christians in the world by 350 A.D. was 33 million. The

Church went from 120 to 33 million in 3 centuries – over half of the Roman empire and beyond. The Church is not a place we go. The Church is a worldwide movement that has literally changed the world. And we, UPVPC, we are part of this movement that is still going and will keep on going until Jesus returns and takes us all home.

Part of what we do together in this movement that is so important, according to God's Word, is to **remember**. We **remember** together what God has done in the past to give us courage and hope and strength and humility and faith for the future. We **remember** as do our Jewish ancestors in the faith in certain ways in certain seasons of the year. Lent is one such season. For 40 days (48 if you count the Sundays which are meant to be feast days) we remember Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary. Not that we don't do this all year, but in a more intentional way as a body of believers, during Lent we focus on our own sins and shortcomings as we refocus on our Savior. Here, we set the communion table each Sunday during Lent. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We enter into reflection & stillness as we remember his body broken for us and his blood shed for us. Apart from the communal structure of the Church, a person might 'give something up' for Lent, but to really **remember** as God intends, I believe we need each other. We need 'this' – the body of Christ gathered together. It is a beautiful thing unlike any other gathering we might attend.

It is very easy for us to fall into thinking like we read about in Deuteronomy 8 that we have gotten ourselves where we are - that our own intelligence and ingenuity and our own financial savvy and artistic abilities have gotten us here. We need each other to stay low, to stay humble, to stay submitted to Jesus Christ, to truly want with all our heart for him to become more and for ourselves to become less. Our words, our deeds, our body language, our attitude, our use of resources all reveal whether we are truly submitting our lives to Christ or we are not. The way we engage with the Church movement worldwide to provide help & rescue for people living in extreme physical & spiritual poverty reveals how serious we are about **remembering** God's Word written and revealed in the life & ministry of Jesus. We cannot be a healthy, flourishing movement of disciples of Jesus and forget or ignore the physical & spiritual desperation of people all around the world. We cannot allow ourselves to only show mercy, love, & compassion to people we know & see in our own communities. That is completely against what Jesus commanded us to do right before he ascended into Heaven.

In Acts 1:8 he told his disciples that they were his witnesses. A witness is someone who tells the truth about something they have seen and heard. His disciples, also called his witnesses are those who tell the truth to others about who Jesus is, what he has done in the past, and what he is still doing right now in the lives of those who put their faith in him. We are his witnesses. Jesus said to his followers, "*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea & Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" In other words, "You will be my witness in Jerusalem where they hate those who follow Jesus (so get over that), you will be my witnesses in Judea & Samaria (Samaritans were people that the Jews hated – so get over that), and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth – places you've never seen and never even thought of visiting (so get over living in your own little bubble). Our work, as part of this movement of believers called the Church, is to extend the love of God to all people everywhere by caring for them and telling them about the saving grace of Jesus. It's about our next-door neighbors, yes, but it goes far beyond the property lines of our villages.

Every year the UPVPC congregation goes on a Lenten journey together. I prayerfully choose a study that we will all do together – though in our separate small groups. Sermons revolve around the themes of the study. It gets us all 'on the same page' so to speak as we make our approach to the cross and the empty tomb as one, unified people. It's our Lenten festival sort-of - something we all do together to **remember** with contrite, grateful hearts.

This year our study is called *Something Needs to Change* by pastor David Platt. The subtitle is "*A Call to Make Your Life Count in a World of Urgent Need.*" I felt a stirring in my soul towards this study for us in this 2020 year of the Bible. I believe God wants us to remember that reading his Word as many of us are doing together this year is great. It's great, and I trust God will help me

bring in our Bible readings alongside our reflections on the Lenten study. But just reading God's Word without doing anything about it falls short, friends. Faith without works is dead. Reading through the whole Bible without putting any of it into practice is fruitless. I pray that our journey together during Lent will not be fruitless, but will produce a God-sized abundant harvest of fruit that reveals God's love to people who don't at this very moment know how desperate they are for Jesus.

Who are the people beside you at school, in your home, at your workplace, in your neighborhood, at the restaurants you like to frequent, who are the people right around you who need an invitation to join you in your walk of faith? Who does not attend a church currently and needs an invitation to come to church with you? Did you know most people who don't come to a church building don't come because they have not been invited? It's daunting to think about coming all by yourself to a new place with new people with particular ways of doing things that you know nothing about. No one wants to stick out as the 'new guy.' Right now, let's think about who God is calling us to invite, and let's ask God for the right words, the right tone, and the right time (which is now!). For us to do what God has called us to do, I believe *Something Needs to Change* – and that something starts with me and my awareness of the physical needs and, quite frankly, my affinity towards comfort & convenience, and my apathy sometimes towards those who need to know Jesus. I don't want to be this way. I don't want to ignore the desperate physical & spiritual needs of people Jesus died to save. I want to always **remember** how desperate I was without Jesus and the relief and peace that came when I finally surrendered my life to him.

John Stott wrote this in his classic book *Basic Christianity* (pp. 144-45), "*The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers – the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. All too many people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become a little bit involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder cynics complain of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.*"

Something Needs to Change, friends, for this extraordinary movement of which we are a part to continue its work of transferring lost souls from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom ruled by Christ. I urge you to start the Lenten journey together this Wednesday with our Ash Wednesday worship at 6:30 p.m. here in the sanctuary. And, I urge you to go deeper on Sundays or Wednesday evenings by adding a small group hour to your schedule. It's a beautiful way to honor and remember all God has done, together, with the people of God. Amen.