

January 30, 2005  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
Micah 6:1-8  
Pastor Ott

### **Remember What God Has Done!**

Memory. Memory can play tricks on you at times, can't it? Did you ever get together with a friend and talk about something and have completely different recollections of something? It happens from time to time. Sometimes we find ourselves walking some place in the house and when you get to where you are going, do you find yourself standing there looking around saying, "what in the world did I come in here for?" Memory at times can fail us.

Sometimes it is frightening when that happens. This past week, I think it was Wednesday, I was sitting at the desk and I was trying to do something on the phone and had to give my phone number. I couldn't remember my own phone number. I had to ask Paula what our phone number was. Then what was really scary was about 10 minutes later I couldn't remember it again. I had to ask her again when I was doing something else.

That gets a little more frightening since Paula and I go around the country and give presentations on ministering to people with Alzheimer's. It made me start thinking about some of those things. But memory with Alzheimer's is a little different. It is not just forgetting things from time to time like we are talking about. It is more like all of your life you have kept your yard manicured perfectly and all of a sudden you go in the garage and you look at that thing and you can't figure out for the life of you what a lawn mower is for anymore. You completely forget the use of things.

Memory. Memory can lead us into problems when we can't remember certain things as well. And when we can't call some of these things to mind it is eternally frightening, which is what our sermon text is about today. God has a charge against his people, the children of Israel. And one of the things he charges them with is that they have forgotten. Their memory has failed them. They don't remember all of the wonderful acts of love and mercy that God had done for them. And because of that, they were treating each other with contempt. The rich were taking advantage of the poor. The strong were taking advantage of the weak. And then when they would get caught, they would just bribe their way out of things. This was the condition of life in Israel at the time of Micah the prophet. If you read Micah's prophesy, he deals at length with those kind of issues. God charges them with their sin and says the reason that it has happened is because they have forgotten the incredible acts of our God.

So, as God speaks to us today, as the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts and our lives through the prophet Micah, he says to us, "*Remember what God has done*". Don't let God's love and mercy become a casualty of your memory. Remember what He has done. Remember His acts of love. And then he reminds us that this memory has a purpose, so that we live in a way that glorifies and pleases the God who has loved us first.

Micah lived about the same time as Isaiah. About 700 years before Jesus was born. But Micah 6 brings us one of his sermons that really makes up his entire book, or at least a portion of it. And Micah really has the people think as though they were in a courtroom. God brings the charges. He brings the charges before these inanimate objects, the hills and the mountains that have seen, so to speak, the sins of the children of Israel. God brings the charges. The people respond, and then the prophet himself speaks and says what the truth of the matter is. God brings these charges. He says, *"What have I done to you? How have I burdened you?"* Then He lists them the things He has done. *"I brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses... I sent Aaron and Miriam... remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."* His charge against them is that they had forgotten the righteous acts of the Lord and that is what was leading them to act in the ways that were despicable to God. The things that God had said were against His will.

He reminds them how he had brought them out of the land of slavery, delivered them. They would know the story, the powerful miracles. But maybe they had begun to hear those and forgot to apply them to their own lives. He tells them about Moses who lead them and Aaron and Miriam. Then he talks about *what Balak king of Moab counseled*. If you remember that story, Balak had hired Balaam son of Beor, a heathen prophet, to go and curse the Israelites. He was to speak a curse upon them so that when they got closer to Moab they wouldn't be a threat to him. That was his plan at least. If you remember, God caused Balaam to speak a blessing instead of a curse on the children of Israel. And what was included in that blessing was a wonderful prophesy of the Savior to come--the One who would take away the sins of the people. So even in his charges against them, he pointed them to things that should have reminded them that the answer to their shortcomings, their sins, is the Promised Savior. He says, *"Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal"*. They were camped at Shittim. They were going to cross into the Promised Land soon. When they were there in Shittim, instead of rejoicing and celebrating and praising God, they decided to rejoice and celebrate and praise a false god--the god of some of the people of Shittim. And they praised that false God with all kinds of sexual sins. And yet God, in His mercy, didn't destroy them as He could have. God acted in grace and brought them into the Promised Land. God pointed out their sin, but then He didn't give them what their sins deserved.

God wants His people to remember those acts of love that God has shown so that they would turn away from their sin--so that they would see the promise of the Savior and find forgiveness in that Savior and then live for their Lord.

We might shake our heads and say, "Look at all these people and the advantages that they had, God leading them by fire at night, a pillar of cloud by day and their descendants and all those after kept turning away from Him." But you and I really are no different. We at times forget the wonderful acts of our Lord. We forget it, and we take it for granted. We don't really go beyond maybe at times the head knowledge of it. It doesn't touch our hearts and our lives in a way that changes us. It is not just a good

interesting book to read. It is not an interesting movie. It is a life changing event when we see our sins. Then we see what we have done and how we have turned our back on God. How we at times have chased after our own desires. When God says go to the right or the left, we go the other direction, the left or the right. When God says love me, love my word, we love ourselves and our pleasure. We all too often forget the incredible acts of God's love for us because we are focused more on what we want today in our lives. Or what we need God to fix today, and we forget some of these things.

The incredible thing about our God is He says he forgives our sins and remembers them no more. And He did this before you or I repented. He did this before even all eternity. He had this plan that He would send Jesus to live in our place, to die in our place, to take away our sins. And then through the faith that God has given us, He forgives our sins and remembers them no more. You and I might think of that word "remember" and think about just fondly recalling an old memory. Or maybe look back and have a tear come to our eye as we remember something bad in the past.

When God uses that word in scripture, it means to remember and then to call to mind and then act on that memory. If God were to call to mind our sins and act on them, you and I would be destined for Hell. But we are told in scriptures that God blots them out. He remembers them no more. God's memory has failed completely when it comes to your and my sins and we are covered in the blood of Jesus Christ. You and I so often say we will forgive but not forget. Well God does both. And we rejoice that He has or otherwise we would be lost in our trespasses and sins without a hope of Heaven.

So remember God's act of love. Remember how he acts towards us. Not because of who we are, not because we have earned it, not because we've deserved it, not because we can do anything for Him, but because He is a loving God who acts in mercy to the Israelites and to us.

The Israelites didn't get the message though. They heard it and then they started speaking in the middle of our text and say, "*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?*" They go back to what they were used to doing—bribery. So they come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old, the expensive offering, quality. Is quality going to buy God off so He won't be angry with me? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Will quantity buy off God's anger at me? Then, "*Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*" So warped had the Israelites become in their relationship with God that they considered doing what God had said was an abomination to Him in His law. But they had seen it done in the heathen nations around them, the heathen religions, the human sacrifice, so maybe that will buy off God. It misses the point. They didn't understand. They didn't call to mind God's acts. Instead they were focused still on themselves and what they could do.

If you and I think we are going to buy God off with what we do saying, "God I have trouble. I have illness. I have sickness. I have heartache in relationships. Lord, I am going to go to church every Sunday, just take this away from me." We miss the point. Don't call to mind, don't remember our planned acts of love to buy God off. Remember

His acts of love toward us. That He acted while we were still lost and condemned in our sins. Remember His acts of love. Not some planned bribery of our own. That is where our forgiveness lies. And then when we call those things to mind, who He is and how Jesus lived and died in our place, then the prophet speaks and tells us what God is looking for. He says, *“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* To set aside any confidence in your own merit and instead trust completely and absolutely in God’s justice and mercy. And then reflect it in your daily life. Not because you have to or else God will punish you. But reflect it in your daily life. Do what He has called you to do. Share His word. Grow in His word. Live His word. Because it is how you say “thank you” and how you humble yourself before the Lord. It is how you thank Him for the gift of the robe of righteousness that He has given to all who believe in Him.

That is God’s answer. Remember me and remember what I have done, He says to us. And then live in a way that reflects that love so that others may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven. That’s how Jesus continues in the Sermon on the Mount and tells us to let our light shine.

You know, it really doesn’t matter if we forget our phone number. It doesn’t matter if we forget where we place the car keys. It might cause an inconvenience for a time. But if we get so distracted by the things of this life that we forget the wonderful acts of God’s love, then we are in trouble. So engrain them in your mind and in your heart through a constant study of God’s word and a constant use of the means of grace. And then God’s love will show through you to others as you live to thank Him.