

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY
Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost - November 7, 2004
All Saints' Sunday – Laity Sunday
Anne G. Cohen

Luke 20:27-38

For Our Reflection:

However desperate the chance for survival may be, the chance for collective survival in the sense of an endless material continuance of its race and its culture is more desperate by far.

– W.P. Montague, *The Way of Things* (1940)

The supreme desire of everything, and that first given by Nature, is to return to its source; and since God is the source of our souls and Maker of them... to [God] this soul desires above all to return.

– Dante, *Il Convito* (c.1310)

The Memory of God

Think about your autobiography... and take a few moments, if you like, to jot down about six chapter headings.

How have you organized those chapters? Chronologically? Thematically?

A chronological list might look like this:

- Chapter One: The Circumstances of My Birth
- Chapter Two: Education and Political Indoctrination
- Chapter Three: Escape from Family
- Chapter Four: Return to the Clan
- Chapter Five: Golden Handshakes
- Chapter Six: Legacy

A thematic list – marking life in Kairos time rather than chronological time might look like this:

- Chapter One: The Dread of Heredity
 - Chapter Two: The Biology of Love
 - Chapter Three: Things I Learned Without Any Help
 - Chapter Four: Strange Men I Never Knew
 - Chapter Five: Democracy in a 12-Step Society
 - Chapter Six: Other People's Children
- And so on.....

It is an interesting exercise – just writing down the outline of a remembered life – without necessarily filling out the content on paper. It is a way of finding out how you construct meaning in your life – and, with that self-awareness, how to make your life more meaningful.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner believes that:

Memory is the connections. Meaning comes from what something is connected to. Something unconnected, unassociated with, unrelated to anything is literally meaningless. Conversely, something connected, associated, linked with many things is supercharged with

meaning. And the farther back in time the connections go, the greater the meaning. By joining pieces of our lives together we create ourselves, free ourselves. It's all in the order and the sequence. For this reason, memory may be more in the way things are stored, rather than what is stored.

It is not accidental that the great feast of remembering our redemption, is called simply: [Seder] The Order.

- The Book of Words pp.87-88

The religious life, especially in Judeo-Christian tradition, is ALL about this process of Remembering, Meaning-Making, Ordering and Connecting life experience to the larger, cosmic, ongoing Story. For us, The Bible is a basic tool for exploring and finding meaning in our experiences – out in a larger, historical and spiritual context. So are the New Member orientations you hold in this church – where stories are told and connections made.

In ancient Judaism, remembering was the basic tool for achieving immortality – the ultimate in a meaningful life. When a person died, it was believed that they physically and truly died. But as long as the Community remembered them – repeated their name in the Kaddish prayer – told their story – they lived on.

The person responsible for remembering the names and repeating the Kaddish prayer for the dead was your son. Therefore, you must have sons. The vehicle for ensuring sons and connecting those sons to the father – was marriage to the woman who bore those sons.

In the deepest sense of the word, marriage was equivalent to procreation – which was the assurance of immortality. Therefore, what Jesus said to the Sadducees was counter-cultural, radical – worthy of note and important for sorting out the meaning of our own lives.

The Sadducees, part of an intimate Temple hierarchy, held this same belief that immortality was through procreation. They did not believe in life after death – in the sense of resurrection. They asked Jesus a ridiculous question regarding a single wife to seven brothers – pointing out the relationship conundrums that become possible if one believes in continued existence after death. You can't say the Sadducees didn't have a sense of humor.

What Jesus says in response is, basically, in THIS world we marry to procreate – in order to ensure immortality through our sons. BEYOND this world – we don't have to rely on the fragile memories of mortals – because God's Memory holds us all – eternally. Marriage is unnecessary because procreation is unnecessary because GOD REMEMBERS US.

As with all amazing things stated by this particular rabbi, the questions raised by his assertion are astonishing.

If God Remembers us, then we might begin with, "How do I define God?"

And in light of my definition of God, "How would I describe the Memory of God? How do I imagine the mechanics of it?"

Is it a cosmic energy force – imprinted like our own brains by the indentation of my own unique life force?

Is it a constant reshaping of galaxies and oceans, constellations and eroded tectonic upheavals?

Is God's Memory something we call the Collective Unconscious?

Or is it the Buddhist concept of inescapable Interbeing?

Is it, after all, the memory of the Community – with or without sons – stored in a loaf of bread and a cup of fermented grape juice and a book?

Or is it a larger form of cellular body memory – much like Clarissa Estes describes in Women Who Run with the Wolves?

The body uses its skin and deeper fascia and flesh to record all that goes on around it. Like the Rosetta stone, for those who know how to read it, the body is a living record of life given, life taken, life hoped for, life healed...

The body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember, even the little finger remembers. Memory is lodged in pictures and feelings in the cells themselves. Like a sponge filled with water, anywhere the flesh is pressed, wrung, even touched lightly, a memory may flow out in a stream...
- Brussat p. 370

The image of God's Justice poured out "like an ever flowing stream" goes deep in our tradition – why not God's Memory flowing the same way? We think of God so often in human terms – but do we imagine that God has a BODY that stores and orders and remembers all of us, all events, in a meaningful way?

And this leads me to more questions:

Does God's mind, like the human mind, create false memories – filling gaps, making meaning, adding illustrations, rearranging things to suite a divine sense of order?

Does God embellish – like the best of story tellers – and even change the story a little - every time it's told?

Is God's memory chronological and exhaustive?

Or does God's memory sort out and store only the Kairos moments – the strikingly meaningful events – according to God?

These are unanswerable questions, but ponderable because of how our human minds work. They are questions that connect us to a larger context, moving us beyond self-absorption to a recognition of our inescapable Interbeing. And I believe that this Interbeing has more to do than we'll ever consciously know – with our IMMORTALITY – in the largest sense of Community memory – the Memory of God.

In this world we may marry or not marry or not be allowed to marry. In this world we may procreate or not procreate or not be able to procreate. In this world we may never know if we have made an impression, been a role model, changed the world for the better one iota.

But I believe that through and beyond this world, we are connected to a vast unfolding of possibility, an unlimited capacity for reorganization and remembrance. We each have an irreplaceable role in the Creation Story that continues to be told in a hundred million ways – and is in no way nearing conclusion.

We will be remembered – always – in the Memory of God – however we might describe it. The chapter about our two years of life together might be entitled "From Tumbleweeds to New Foundations." Or perhaps "God Laughed and the Angels Got Busy." However God chooses to label the chapter of Our Time Together – it is enough to know that God will remember – and the universe has changed because of it.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

All Saints' Sunday – Laity Sunday

November 7, 2004

10:00 a.m.

The cross marks (+) in the order of service are an invitation for those in the congregation who are able to stand to do so.

The New Century Hymnal or “Hymnal” has a black cover; prayers are in the back.

The Chapel Songbook or “CSB” is a blue, looseleaf notebook.

When the bell rings you are invited to engage in reflection and quiet listening.

FOR OUR REFLECTION

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WE GATHER FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

Musical Call to Worship

Welcome and Perspective on the Day

Please give the minister your announcements in writing before the service.

Music for Reflection – A Time for Centering

+ **Call to Worship** (unison) *Celtic Book of Prayer*

**Awaken us to Your glory.
Restore a gentleness of touch.
Awaken us to Your glory.
Bring us an awareness of you.
Awaken us to Your glory.**

+ **Opening Hymn**

Immortal, Invisible...

Hymnal # 1

+ **Opening Prayer** (unison) *Celtic Book of Prayer*

**I bind unto myself today
the virtues of the starlit heaven
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks.**

**I bind unto myself today
the power of God to hold and lead,
God's eye to watch, God's might to stay,
God's ear to hearken to my need,
the wisdom of my God to teach,
God's hand to guide, God's shield to ward;
the word of god to give me speech,
God's heavenly host to be my guard.**

+ **Our Common Prayer** (unison)

**Creator God who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom and the power
And the glory forever. Amen.**

Time for Silent Reflection (you may be seated)

One: My soul waits in silence.

All: **God is my rock and my fortress. I will be at peace.**

Silent Reflection

The Assurance of Good News (unison)

**We are bound to God by the stable earth,
the deep salt sea, around the old eternal rocks.**

Sung Response "Hallelujah... God be praised!" (CSB #5 Refrain)

We Offer Our Gifts So That Our Lives May Be Our Prayer

Offertory

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

God, we trust in You. May we give until the world stops hurting.

WE TEACH, REFLECT AND PROCLAIM

The Just Peace Reflection was introduced to our worship service by our Just Peace Committee.

It is a weekly reminder of the need for social justice in order to create a peaceful world.

Just Peace Reflection

Conversation with Our Children

Reading from the Christian Gospel of Luke 10:27-38

Sermon The Memory of God

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION

Celebration of Holy Communion

+ **Welcome to the Table** *I Come With Joy* Hymnal #349

Invitation

Sharing the Bread and the Cup

Communion will be served to you as you remain seated. Please wait until all have been served before eating the bread – and again before drinking the cup – to signify our unity with one another and with all who eat and drink at God's table this day.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

We affirm the goodness of life and the openness of the future because our God is a God of life and love. As God comes to us in this act of communion, so let us go out to others in acts which bring healing, reconciliation and hope to our world. Amen.

Intercessions, Celebrations and Encouragements

Our Joys and Concerns

Call to Prayer *Be still and know that I am God* Hymnal # 743

Time for Silence

Offering of Prayer

+ **Sending Hymn** *Savior God Above* Hymnal # 602

+ **Benediction** (unison) *Celtic Book of Prayer*

**God to enfold me, God to surround me,
God in my speaking, God in my thinking,
God in my sleeping, God in my waking,
God in my watching, God in my hoping,
God in my life, God in my lips,
God in my soul, God in my heart,
God in my sufficing, God in my slumber,
God in mine ever-living soul,
God in mine eternity.**

+ **Sung Response** (You are welcome to form a circle) Hymnal # 236

**Halle, halle, halle – lu – ja, Halle, halle, halle – lu – ja,
Halle, halle, halle – lu – ja, Halleluja, halleluja.**

+ **Postlude**

WORSHIP NOTES

Call to Worship is by David Adam, *Celtic Book of Prayer from the Northumbria Community* p.285

Opening Prayer Ibid. p.345

Benediction is by Carmina Gaedelica, Ibid. p.364