

Psalm 78:1-39

Settling In: Remembering Our Story

September 10, 2017

This morning we're going to be talking about remembering...and forgetting.

As we settle into this new season, it is good to be grounded in our shared story.

Our reading today comes to us from Psalm 78.

People of God hear now the Word of the Lord.

(Reading of Psalm 78:1-39)

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Psalm 78 tells us the story of Israel.

And it tells us by use of contrast...

By setting the people of Israel and God side by side.

In their comparison the two are strikingly different.

Like setting black next to white.

Or success next to failure.

Who are the people?

In verse 11 we read that they are the "forgetters."

"They forgot what God had done, the wonders he had shown them."

These are the people who walked through the Red Sea.

Who passed by on dry ground with walls of water on both sides.

We know the story...

Probably so well that we're numb to just how awesome it is.

But try to put yourselves in the story.

Imagine what it would be like to know nothing but slavery for generations.

To go to work every day for a boss that cares little for you and your family.

Where the work is backbreaking day in and day out.

Having to watch your wife, kids, parents, and friends labor under these same conditions.

It's that one awful job you had.

The one that sucked all of the life out of you...

With that one boss who really knew how to get under your skin.

Now think about the day you quit.

Think about the day you were set free from this situation.

(Hopefully you're not still there)

Witnessing your family set free.

Seeing the chains fall from their legs and wrists.

No longer under obligation to serve the old boss.

This was reality for the Israelites.

They were slaves under Pharaoh, until God set them free.

With his mighty hand God performed miracles and wonders that delivered the people.

They walked across a dry sea bed...

Walls of water on both sides...

Set free from their enemies.

Then God fed them with the bread of angels,

And all of the meat they could fit in their bellies.

I'm pretty sure it was grade A Alberta quail.

He didn't leave them alone to wander through the wilderness either.

He guided by his presence.

A cloud and a pillar of fire that showed the people the way.

**Be amazed Israel at what the Lord has done!**

**Be amazed at the Lord's goodness towards you!**

Yet the people forget.

They forget what God does to deliver them.

His faithful acts and his kindness.

They disregard his goodness.

And forgetting is only where it begins with the people.

The list grows.

They willfully put God to the test...

They *speak* against God...

*Sin* against God...

They do not *believe* in God...

They *lie* to God with their tongues...

Have hearts that are not loyal to him...

They rebel against the Most High...

Arouse the Lord's jealousy...

They anger God continuously...

I'm not making this up.

It's all right there in the psalm.

The psalmist is reminding the people of the past.

He is telling them their story so they wouldn't forget like those before them.

We think, "How could they act like this towards the God who set them free?"

How could they be so forgetful?

Well, we're not so innocent ourselves, are we?

**We are a forgetful people.**

Who here has heard of something called a "built-in forgetter"?

It's somewhere up here...

Lodged between our ears...

And there's no telling when our built-in forgetter is going to act up.

It causes us to forget things.

I'm not just talking about where you put your wallet;

Or forgetting to send the kids with lunch.

Our built-in forgetter can cause some pretty serious problems in our lives.

Like when we get out of a bad or unhealthy relationship.

We're proud and happy with ourselves for taking that big step to end it.

But then the built-in forgetter kicks on.

We start to romanticize the relationship...

We forget about how unhealthy it was.

And we're tempted to return to it because it looks so appealing again.

Or for those of us who are walking through any kind of addiction.

Maybe we've been sober for a little bit and the forgetter switches on.

We forget the pain and suffering caused by our actions in the addiction.

Over time those old habits start to look pretty good again.

We are a *forgetful* people.

We are a *sinful* people.

Like the Israelites we forget our story.

We forget the miracles and wonders by which the Lord set us free.

We forget our past condition.

And we give ourselves over to the cares and cravings of the world.

Now, we don't set out with the intention to do this.

I don't think the Israelites initially intended to turn their back on God.

But this is our nature.

Original sin has "spread through the whole human race and produces in us every sort of sin."

Pastor Rich will be looking at original sin and our condition at the evening service.

So I encourage you to be here for that.

We don't initially set out with the intention to sin against God.

But our forgetter kicks on.

And our natural tendency is to stray from God.

So we slowly walk in the direction of that cliff edge.

If we walk close enough to the edge for long enough...

Flirt next to that slippery slope...

We're bound to slip.

Psychologist Michelle Davis says, "I have lost count of the number of times when a spouse who's been unfaithful says, 'I wasn't looking for an affair, it just happened.'"

Things like this don't just happen.

We wander and stray.

We ease ourselves into sin.

We forget who we belong to...

And we forget our tendency towards sin.

Maybe it's not an affair.

Maybe it's our anxieties.

While part of our anxieties may be caused by stuff to do with our bodies;

We don't always help the situation.

We forget how God rescued us.

How the world belongs to God.

How all good things come out of his abundance.

Something happens in life and our instinct is to panic and despair.

We feel like the walls of the room are closing in around us.

I know this because this is an area where I struggle.

Our forgetter kicks on and we think we're alone in the world...

Like God forgot about us.

Or that he won't provide for us.

We don't always intend to, but we turn our back on God.

We are a forgetful people, who forgets their shared story.

But remember, this is a passage of contrast.

The psalmist is holding the people and God side by side.

We've talked about *our* failures and tendencies.

We've talked about *Israel's* failings.

But the overwhelming message of the psalm is that *God* is faithful.

**God's mercy is greater than our sin.**

While Israel is the one who forgets...

He is the one who remembers.

I want to teach you a word this morning.

On the count of 3 everyone say "Zakar."

Again, "Zakar."

Zakar is the Hebrew word for remember.

Like "I can't remember where I put za-car."

Listen to some places where this word shows up in the Old Testament:

"But God remembered Noah and all the beasts in the ark..."

"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant..."

"So God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham..."

Usually when this word, Zakar, shows up...it is about God's faithfulness.

How God remembers the covenant.

How God chose to love.

Our passage is no different.

Listen to verses 38 and 39:

"Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them."

"He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return."

Zakar.

The Lord remembers.

We only read the first 39 verses of this psalm.

But if we read to the end of the Psalm there are another 33 verses of pretty much the same thing:

A retelling of the Lord's goodness...

His miracles and wonders.

And then the peoples' rebellion.

And then the Lord's goodness.

This Psalm is all about stimulating the memory of the people.

Israel, be amazed at the wonders of the Lord!

Be amazed at God's mercy!

Remember your story!

As we settle into this new season...

New programs and after school activities;

Kids back in school;

You have a new pastor;

The weather will be changing;

We're trying to finish up projects around the house before it gets cold;

Your job might look different with the coming of fall.

As we settle into this new season we are called to remember and give priority to this story.

Psalm 78 points us to our story.

The Lord has remembered us.

And his grace has been lavished on us.

We too were once slaves.

We came running at the call of sin—our former master.

We were destined for the fires of hell and an eternity separated from God.

**Yet he was merciful.**

He remembered that we are only flesh.

He gave his Son so that we might have life:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
was given to us  
To completely deliver us and make us right with God.” (HC Q&A 18)

This is our story.

Sinners loved by God.

Now, knowing our sinful nature, and our tendency to be forgetful,

How much good does it do to tell us to remember?

(When the things we store in our memories are those delicious pecan-cruste  
d chicken dinners)

We are not able to remember this story under our own strength.

We are prone to forgetting.

So, knowing our condition God provides us with reminders of our story...

Of his love for us in Christ.

This is what we do every Sunday.

We do not come under obligation or to check the box off for the week.

We come to retell the story of God’s love,

And to praise him for it.

We come to be refreshed and nourished in this story.

Everything we do flows out of our encounter with God on Sunday mornings.

Everything builds up to it, and then everything flows out of it.

It affects us in our homes, in our jobs, and when we’re out with friends.

It meets us in our stress and anxiety...

And it comforts us in our fears.

This story calls us to repent of our sin and rest in the assurance of God's mercy.

One of my passions in this line of work is worship.

Not just the music, but all of the elements of worship.

How everything we do in worship points us to what God has done.

From the order of worship, to the visual space, to the songs we sing...

Our worship tells the story of salvation.

It reminds us and we find hope in this life.

One place where this happens is in our celebration of the sacraments:

Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Every time we welcome a child into the covenant family, we know that God has set his mark on that child.

He says to them: "You are mine. I claim you as my own."

Every time we witness a baptism we are also reminded of our baptism...

Of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Next week we gather around this table and retell the story of God's love for us in Christ.

This is a meal we share as a community of those who belong to him.

Kids, parents, singles, marrieds, grandparents, and great grandparents.

We come to this table to remember.

And to celebrate what Christ has done for us.

We come to this table to be strengthened in our weakness—

So that we might live as children of God in this world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we begin to settle into the new season...

Let's remember our story—

Encourage one another daily.

Take the time to ask the question: "How did you experience God's  
goodness today?"

I invite and challenge you this week to spend time preparing for our time at the Lord's  
Table next week.

Read through the Catechism on the Lord's Supper.

Read through the words of institution found in Scripture.

Let this serve as a reminder to your of the Lord's faithfulness.

Talk about it when you wake up, before you break bread, and when you rest.

God is faithful to remember his covenant, even when we forget.

He has claimed us as his own,

And he has invited us into this story;

The story of his love.

Thanks be to God.