

April 19 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 4

Luke 24:13-35

Sermon *The Power of Memory*

Two disciples were going home. It was a seven mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus and as they walked a stranger joined them. It was evident that the two disciples were distressed, they were despondent. The stranger asked about their feelings. They were shocked to realize that he did not seem to know about the recent events which had brought them so much sadness in their lives. They thought everybody knew; that everyone had heard the shout of the mob, and the whine of the lash and the hammering of the nail. They remembered today, because they could not forget. But the stranger did not seem to know any of these things. He did not act as if he remembered anything about what they had been talking about. So they told him about their memories. They told him everything that they could remember and then the stranger begins to remember. In fact he remembers far more than those events of the past seven days. He remembers nearly 2,000 years of history. He speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He talks about his memories of Saul and David and Solomon. He recounts the stories of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The history he recalls is one of one of victory and defeat; of exile and restoration; of faith and unbelief and the two disciples remember, also. When the seven mile journey is completing and the day is ending the disciples know it is too far for the stranger to go on to the next town before dark so following the example of their mothers and fathers they offer their house to him as refuge. They provide the hospitality which is commanded to offer strangers in the Law of Moses. The meal they prepare then is a simple one as was the custom they gave the stranger the bread so he could break off a piece. The piece that could be used maybe as a knife or fork to catch the dribbles at the chin like a napkin; a piece that they would complete their meal as frugal as that meal was.

And the miracle occurred just then. The stranger broke the bread and they recognized who he was. and he was the one who had ridden that donkey in the city. He was the one who had been lashed and he one who had been nailed to that tree. He was the one in whom so many of them had hoped. When he left them that nothing in the world made sense. But in seeing him again their hope was restored and life had meaning and life had purpose again.

In this post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, Luke's Gospel tells the story which illustrates the power that God gives to each one of us in memory. As they walked along the road that day, the three men remembered the important scripture

passages of the Bible. The messages of the Old Testament; the promises of the coming Messiah; they remembered the history of their people; they remembered how God had in fact, been amongst them. In their reminiscing they do more than just remembering the past. In addition a new reality is created; a new experience comes to them. "How our hearts were strangely warmed," they said, "our spirits were on fire within us when he broke that bread;" never before had these two disciples of Jesus had such feeling their lives, never before had such a thing had happened to them. All their past came tumbling down around them life was different. Life was somehow new.

A few years ago I went to my grandmother's house before she passed away, for a visit. As I helped her into the house I couldn't help but notice how white her hair was becoming. How deep the lines in her face really were and first time I realized how much like the old photographs of my great grandmother that my grandmother appeared. There were cookies baking in the oven and the aroma drifted through the house and then I could smell again the aromas of my childhood and in that same house. There were always biscuits for breakfast; cornbread for supper; or hot rolls for Sunday dinner; or those apple or cherry pies cooling on the counter for a picnic. You can tell I don't like to eat. And just for a moment I was back in the house of my grandparents which I had known 20 or 25 years before. It all seemed so real to me as if it had just happened yesterday.

I think remembering is more than a thought. I think it is more than just a feeling. Remembering, I think, can become reality for us. Remembering creates something more than what we were before we remembered. It is a powerful experience which can often seem the way we face and act upon the future. The telephone rings in the middle of the night; it awakes me from a sound sleep and a split second between the first ring and picking it up the phone, a flood of memories comes through my mind.

Just for a minute it is more than 20 years ago and I am back in my first parish in Ritzville and it is 4:30 in the morning the hospital is calling me. Aunt Suzie Tom had just passed away. My mind wonders back to a pleasant afternoons spent in Aunt Suzie's elegant living room and the conversation we used to have about what life was like in dusty old Ritzville years some 85 years before when she was just a small child.

I remember the warm summer breeze in my yard one evening as I sit on the front steps and I like to do what Jim likes to do, watch the stars. The scented air whisks me back to a similar evening more than 30 years ago. My best friend and I are seniors in high school just a few days before graduation we sat on the porch swing at my house until late into the night talking about what we thought God wanted us to do with our lives. Even after so many years I can still feel the excitement about the future and those fears of the unknown that I felt same night.

A hunger pain strikes and as I make my way home for a quick sandwich at noon time and that dry coffee taste in my mouth takes me back to a night just couple of years just after high school when the guys in my college dorm room lay awake talking nearly all night as we took part in a fast for world hunger. We gave up our meal cards for day and that amount of money was given to charity for the hungry. We, also, encouraged not going to McDonalds and getting another meal either. That taste in my mouth and feeling in my stomach helped me to somehow imagine the small part of pain suffered by a truly hungry person.

Remembering is a lot more than thought. It is a lot more than just feeling. Remembering is a powerful reality that reveals what a constant truth of life. Remembering takes us on a journey that does end. That is what Jesus disciples on the Emmaus road remembering can make our hearts feel strangely warm and our spirits burn with fire. During this season of Easter we remember those words. He is raised and remembering those words that eternal truth comes anew into the midst of each of our lives. We can feel the dew on our feet. We can smell the crisp morning air. We can see the empty tomb. We can feel the nail prints in his palms and the wound in his side. And with it all the power of that experiences the power and the presence of the living God. We have been made new by God's power. The power of God that brought Jesus out of the bounds of death and has also brought us life; also brought us to true life; has also brought us to full life I think through the power of memory. Amen