

REMEMBERING AND RESURRECTION

Matthew 13: 1-9
Luke 24: 1-12

Faith Community
April 15, 2001

Introduction

A week ago Wednesday night, a young man came into the church at about 9:00. Choir practice was over and everyone had gone home. The custodial staff had arrived and was hard at work. I had my coat on and was walking out the door when I noticed the young man sitting in the front row in the sanctuary. I asked Deb, the supervisor of the custodians, who he was.

“I thought he was a church member,” she said. “He asked if he could just sit in the sanctuary for a while, and I told him I’d be here until about 10, so to help himself.”

I went in and asked the young man if he wanted to talk, or if he preferred just to be alone. He slid over a couple of chairs and said, “No, I wouldn’t mind talking.”

He was in town on business. Since he was Catholic he had gone to St. James Church, but the building was locked up and dark. As he drove by Faith Community he saw the lights on in the sanctuary and decided to stop in here.

He was brought up catholic but for a long time it didn’t mean anything to him. He went to mass, went through the rituals, but didn’t pay much attention to what was being said. He made his first communion and attended catechism class, but it seemed to go in one ear and out the other.

Then a couple of years ago everything changed. “I developed a close relationship with God,” he said. “I knew God’s love and support in a way I had never experienced before.” His life was changed. All the services and classes that had been routine were now speaking to him, molding his life, energizing his faith.

But he was here that night because he had lost that close feeling with God. He was in sales, in a job that was not particularly difficult and which paid good money. He was not married, had free time, and made a good commission. He had just bought a new house and had a brand-new BMW parked outside. He had gotten a little carried away with his new income, and now he was trying to pay down some of the debt he had run up.

“I got this stuff,” he said, “But I’m missing what I really want. I want that relationship with God back in my life. I’m doing well, but what really matters to me is missing.” We continued our talk for quite a while.

Part of what he was doing, and had done, was to reach back and remember what he had learned in church. The worship services that seem so routine, the classes where he gave no indication he was paying attention, the songs he had sung apparently without hearing the words, the people who tried to teach and talk with him – now all these were helps in finding what was important in his life. By actively remembering he was trying to find his way.

I have no doubt that his remembering will lead to a resurrection experience for him. He wants God in his life so much that one day soon he will open the door and let God in.

I

Early on Sunday morning women come to the tomb of the dead Jesus. He died a gory death, hanging on a cross. Now they have come to give him a proper burial – to anoint the body with spices.

But when they get there, the stone that covered the tomb has been rolled away. The tomb was empty. Just as they are asking themselves, “Who took him?” and “Where would they put him?” Two men in dazzling clothes speak to them from the tomb, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” Then they say, “He is not here, he has risen.”

They’re still in shock with the words “living” and “risen” reverberating in their heads when the man says, “Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that he’d be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?”

I pictured stunned silence then.

What happens next? “They remembered his word, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.” “Remember...they remembered.”

When Jesus said the words in Galilee they heard them – “handed over...crucified...third day rise again,” but they didn’t register. Maybe it was too much to hear at one time. But later on they looked back and remembered, and the miracle of the resurrection made sense to them. When they remembered, they could hear and understand what they couldn’t comprehend at first.

II

So often when we are preparing a lesson, and thinking of those blank faces, and the young ones who don’t seem to care at all, we forget that we are creating memories. Some day the children, who give no indication of hearing a word we are saying, will come back to this time and remember. Maybe they won’t remember the lesson just the way we taught it; maybe they will only remember that we were there, that we cared, that we were teaching material that really mattered to us.

Several years ago my sister was in an adult Bible class at her church in Pittsburgh. As the members of this new class were introducing themselves, one young woman spoke about the importance of her experiences in a youth group when she was in high school in Northville, Michigan. After class my sister went to her and asked more about her experience, since I worked in Northville with a senior high youth group. As it turned out she had been part of our youth group. She said to my sister, “I wouldn’t be in the church today if it wasn’t for that youth group, and the way it molded my life.”

When my sister told me about this I was floored, because when this young woman was in high school I would have sworn that she was not getting one thing we were trying to communicate. She was one that we had to keep an eye on, because she was always pushing the boundaries. Very funny, but sometimes a little crazy. You never know what memories you are creating, or what their effect will be years later.

III

All of this relates to Jesus' parable of the sower. A man goes out into his field and throws seed on the ground. He throws it in all directions. Some of the seed falls on a worn down path, some falls on rocky ground, some falls among the thorns, and some falls on good, rich soil. I think the parable is telling us to scatter seed everywhere. Some seed will grow, some won't, but keep throwing the seed out there.

And I don't think the traditional interpretation of this parable is correct. It isn't that some people are good soil, which will receive the seed and make it thrive, while other people are hardened or thorny or rocky. Isn't there some thorny soil in all of us? Aren't all of us hardened at times? Don't we all have some tremendously rocky character to us sometimes?

If the seed keeps being thrown, some of that seed will reach the good soil in each one of us and take hold. None of us is receptive all the time. We go through phases in our lives when hardly anyone can get through to us, but at other times we are rich, fertile soil where roots can take hold and go down deep. So, I think the parable says keep throwing that seed; keep teaching, keep talking, keep leading retreats, keep planning, keep listening, even when no one seems to be responding. Because some day, someone will reach back and remember...and you will have been the one that made the difference. You.

IV

Without Jesus' teaching and preparation, the disciples wouldn't have comprehended what was taking place at the resurrection. They wouldn't have believed what was happening right around them. Jesus told them, he taught them, he preached, he confided in them; he warned them that his death was coming.

And he let them know that God's power was greater than death. He prepared them so that they wouldn't lose hope. He taught about resurrection, and living the resurrection life – a life of love, forgiveness, hope, and especially trust in God. He planted seeds everywhere.

At the time his disciples comprehended very little of what he was saying. Most of it went over their heads...but then one day they would reach back and remember...and it would make all the difference.

The women remembered what Jesus said about his death and resurrection, and then suddenly this awful mystery made sense. "They haven't stolen his body, he told us this would happen!" Later as the disciples continued Jesus' ministry after his death and resurrection, they constantly reached back and remembered what he had taught them, how he had lived his life, how he healed the sick, how he reached out to those who were rejected. They built the Christian church on that remembering.

Conclusion

This past week I was remembering my experiences in Sunday school as a little kid. I wasn't remembering the Sunday that I reached into the offering basket and took out money instead of putting some in. That was the Sunday that Mrs. Koster – a quiet, but most caring and

compassionate woman – mentioned to me after Sunday school that we aren't supposed to take money out of the offering, but put it in.

Now this didn't make sense to me. I looked at her with a puzzled look and some frustration for her failure to understand. I mean, my Dad was the pastor of the church. Finally I said to her what I thought should be perfectly obvious. "What difference does it make? My Dad gets it all in the end!"

That wasn't the Sunday I was remembering. Actually I keep trying to forget that incident, but I can't.

I was remembering a song we loved to sing in Sunday school when I was there in the 1950's. It was a song of revolution, although we didn't know it at the time. We sang these words, maybe you did too, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world – red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world."

In this song are words of rebellion. We didn't have any idea about that, we just loved to sing it at the top of our lungs. Little 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 year old kids belting out "Jesus loves the little children."

But in the 60's we would reach back and remember what we had learned in that little song. All people of all colors are equally precious in the eyes of God. No second class citizens, no whites-only fountains, no riding in the back of the bus. No. "Jesus loves the little children...ALL the children of the world...red, yellow, black, white..."

We didn't know we had learned it – we were just singing a great little song. But one day we remembered what we had sung and we sang it again, with careful attention to every syllable. A seed had been planted. It lay dormant in the ground for years, but then it forced its way through the crust of the earth and sprouted. It stretched tall and blossomed.

We had gotten older, but we remembered. That remembering helped bring about the resurrection of a people and a nation. People who had been held down were raised up. People filled with hatred were free to love and care. A nation infected with sin, was able to heal.

It was just a little song...but people remembered.

Amen.