



Westminster Presbyterian Church

The Rev. David Fleming
November 26, 2017 Sermon

Remembering is Remembering

Scripture Lessons: I Corinthians 11:23-26

On last week's bountifully filled smorgasbords of culinary delights, which delighted you the most? The turkey? The sweet potatoes? The bread dressing? The oyster bread dressing? We always had both kinds in order to fully satisfy the preferences of all of the members of my extended family.

One memorable year Mother decided that travelling from our home in Indiana to Hueston Woods State Park, renting two cabins and eating Thanksgiving dinner in the park lodge would free us from time spent in the kitchen in order to spend time together. It was a bad miscalculation. We did enjoy a beautiful fall day together on Wednesday but gave up our cabins on Thursday morning and, after a wonderful meal in the lodge, what? Have you ever tried to stretch out on the floor, watch the football games and share quality family time together in an Ohio State Park lodge lobby?

The Hebrew Feast of Booths, one of the three major pilgrimage feasts of Judaism, occurred at the conclusion of the major harvest season. Constructing booths or small huts in the fields was reminiscent of the accommodations used by the people of Israel as they wandered in the Sinai wilderness. Booths in the fields also served as sentry posts for those who were protecting the fields from marauding enemies.

The reinstatement of the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles occurred upon the return to Israel of the exiled Hebrews around the year 536 B.C., fully nine centuries since their sojourn in Egypt. That kind of nine hundred plus year memory beats most of the traditions of western civilization. And since Jews like to eat just as well as Christians, we can project that there were some sweet potatoes and maybe even oyster dressing served at the festival. But the real issue was the celebration of the reestablishment of a society, a religious community.

When God's people left Egypt the Lord used cloud, fire and leaders like Moses to guide them on a forty-year journey. In the midst of that journey the people stopped,

not just for physical rest but to remember Yahwey, the Lord, and Yahwey's deliverance of them and to acknowledge the Lord's presence with them. And there, in the wilderness of Sinai, the people erected small structures, temporary shelters that could be taken down and moved because they were still a people without a permanent home. But they were together.

Remembering is putting it together again. Changing the pronunciation may seem like creating a word play. But the words are the same. Remembering or remembering. Remembering is bringing back into our minds events or even feelings that are important to us or should be. In my case I am privileged to be able to remember childhood participation in a wonderful community and much of it surrounded life in a church. The Israelites were privileged and admonished to remember the ways in which God delivered them and brought them together.

In Deuteronomy we read: "Remember the long way the Lord your God has led you . . . in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep God's commandments. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God."

When Joshua led the new nation over the Jordan River into the land God had provided for them he had them place twelve stones in the river for a crossing place, saying: "These stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever." And he reminded them that it was just as the Lord had done at the crossing of the Red Sea.

Several centuries later Paul, instructed by Jesus, told his readers about a memorial celebration which Jesus himself created. And we know about the community which developed in response to Christ's reconnecting his followers with God. Remembering is remembering. The Reformed family of churches distinctly holds that the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, the actual presence, is in the communion or community, not in the elements. That's why the Supper is only to be celebrated in a common worship experience, not privately. The exception is when a portion of the worshipping community, a pastor and some elders or deacons, take that experience to a place where a person not able to attend worship may participate in it.

Remembering cleverly works the other way as well. When we remember we have the potential to reconnect and when we are reconnected we have the possibility to recall that which is of importance to us. Don't tell me we really want to reconnect at high school reunions so that we can remember awkward, skinny bodies, crooked teeth, thick lens glasses and the homecoming queen that wouldn't even look my way. It is possible that it's fun to see how much worse for wear our childhood friends now look or the surprised expressions on their faces when we brag

about our success that makes possible world-wide travel. No, I really enjoy attending reunions because they provide a reminder for me of the wonderful life I was privileged to live, how by the grace of God and great parents I got orthodontia and contact lenses and filled out a little.

I know my story is not necessarily shared by all of you and that I may suffer from selective memory, but life seemed very good to me except for, of course, being deprived of ever having a Daisy Red Rider BB Gun. I enjoy attending reunions because they remind me of the importance of relationships and the powerful privilege of being a part of a community, even my childhood spiritual community, again a gift from God.

Reconnecting enables important reminders of who we are created to be. And, as an important aside, the world is watching, watching us. Stanley Hauerwas, in *The Church as Polis*, wrote: "The Church is constituted as a new people who have been gathered from the nations to remind the world that we are in fact one people. Gathering, therefore, is an eschatological act as it is the foretaste of the unity of the communion of the saints." In a world, particularly a contemporary American society, in which disconnect seems to prevail and taking sides is the standard and disparaging remarks about others are public traffic and shameless partisanship trumps common needs, wouldn't it be great to see the spiritual community represent a new normal, teaching the world, as it were, how to behave as community.

I may have shared this particular story with you before, but at my age I am more than allowed to repeat myself. On a particular Sunday I arrived home from church to find that a very large limb had fallen from the tree, in our neighbor's yard, into our yard. This doesn't seem fair since it happened while I was at worship and I would be required to clean up the resulting mess.

When our four-year-old son and I assessed the damage, he picked up a twig with the five leaflets of a compound hickory leaf that matched the downed tree. In his childhood innocence he asked me: "Daddy, where did this come from?" I did not reply with what I was thinking, but told him that it very likely came from the downed hickory tree since it was a hickory leaf just like the others that were laying all over our yard. But, of course, lacking smart parental instinct, I then said: "Why do you want to know?" And Matt said to me: "Because I want to put it back."

II Corinthians 5.19 in *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles* by Clarence Jordan reads: "God was in Christ hugging the world to himself." God in Christ puts us back into relationship with God and with each other. God remembers us and in Christian community we must never forget that. Thanks be to God.

