

With the an early transition to Daylight Savings Time and the formal beginning of spring many of us were filled with hope that this winter of discontent might be coming to an end ... and then along came another snow storm and more bitter cold. Long time Coloradans chuckle at us relative newcomers and relate fraught memories of REAL spring blizzards in the past. Like the April storm in 1997 that closed even Grace Church ...by police mandate.

Memories, all kinds of memories, are important elements in who each person of us is. And, of course, we each remember things in our individual ways. At the funeral of my beloved 93-year-old grandmother my brother and I reminisced. Memories of staying with her when our father was overseas always included her kneeling on arthritic knees with a skinny little braid down her back as she said her nightly prayers, including by name her seven children and 23 grand-children. I said to him that she had been so powerful in my life and was surely a major reason that I'm a deacon today. He looked at me astonished and said, "That little old lady?" Even in families some memories have vastly different weights.

Sometimes remembered events like the dates of great storms help give our pasts a kind of theme. But then there are also those dark thoughts that keep coming up, souvenirs of moments of shame or pain or anger. Many of us find ourselves unable to forget and we get tangled up in the difference between forgive and forget. Today we have some advice that Isaiah passed on from the Lord that can help us live with our pasts. He wrote, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old." He had been talking about the power of the Lord to open a way in the seas and he was foreseeing the complaints from the Israelites as soon as things got tough in the desert. Do you remember that instead of giving thanks for deliverance from years of slavery they quickly began to whine and yearn for the fish and cucumbers and melons they used to have? A strange distorted nostalgia. Looking back in this way for the things of old was not healthy for them because the advice continues, "I am about to do a new thing." And this is the promise that our faith holds out to us.

As we have looked inward during the past weeks we are not meant to be digging up old grudges or agonizing over choices we have made, we are preparing ourselves for the wondrous "new thing" of Easter Day.

Here we stand today, nearing the end of Lent, and it's a good time to look back and review how the disciplines that we planned for this season have worked. This is not so we can beat ourselves up for the pledges unfulfilled nor it is occasion to preen on the lost pounds or even the money put aside for an Easter offering but so we can reflect on the patterns of our lives. In his letter to the Philippians Paul looked back to his high status days before Damascus changed his life forever and he had been very proud of his status. But he wrote that though he had suffered the loss of *all* things he had come to see them as rubbish. This is another example of how our memories of what's of value changes as new things come into our lives. Probably we can all remember that Paul is the man who said, "When I was a child I thought as a child ..."

After the new thing of the presence of Jesus came to Paul he was able to know what was truly important and that it wasn't clinging to the past nor weighing himself down with regrets. Instead it was "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead ... the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ". It is this prize that we walk toward as we hold in our memory the stories that we will re-live during Holy Week. These celebrations, repeated year after year, serve as a pathway for us and provide a holy pattern as we seek the prize.

Sometimes the memory of things in the past inspire us to great acts of thanksgiving. A couple of weeks ago there was the lovely story of the elderly school teacher who had lived very plainly in a tiny house in Illinois that had been given to her by the local college. She didn't have a car but she did have the memory of education as a joy in her life and who believed education crucial to the success of young people. She had been given a few shares of stock when she was a young woman and she held on to them. Happily they split and grew in value over the years and on her death she astounded everyone by leaving her estate of \$7 million and the little house to Lake Forest College! Such gifts come from grateful hearts nourished by the memory of gifts received throughout our lives.

The wildly extravagant gift of that pound of costly perfume from Mary must have been the same kind of thanksgiving for the miraculous gift of the restoration of her brother Lazarus. Maybe she understood the new thing that Jesus was bringing into the world; surely she remembered the sorrow of preparing Lazarus' body for the burial, not knowing that would be transformed into by the new thing that Jesus accomplished.

But what about those of us who are troubled by the dark memories, the regrets for paths we wish we hadn't taken, of our own failures and the troubles of our families; the dragging memories of anger that persists because of betrayals of our trust? For some of us here those shadows cut out the light of hoping for a new thing and each day is a struggle to face the routines of life because we are carrying along heavy burdens of the past.

It's not just Lent that offers us a way to acknowledge where we've gone astray and we don't have to wait all year for Lent and Easter to hold us up. There is a wonderful Greek word, *anamnesis*, that the church uses to help us remember the right things to make us stronger. Anamnesis originally meant the loss of forgetfulness or today, recollection or remembrance. (It's more familiar opposite is amnesia -- the loss of memory.) In the midst of humanity's daily lives through the centuries the word took on another layer of meaning and came to be connected with our celebration of the Eucharist, based on the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. He said to the disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Like all life the Holy Communion is a mixture of sorrow and joy and we need to remember both. The anamnesis of this weekly remembrance of the sacrifice and the resurrection of our Lord can provide for us the strength we need. Coming together to the altar will assure us of the loss of forgetfulness as we put down the weight of former things, forgetting what lies behind, and sorting out the rubbish and leaving that behind. So let us press on toward the goal living day by day in remembrance of him who died for us. **Amen.**