

## Sermon 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020

What do you do with your poppy after Remembrance Day? Do you throw it away? Or keep it for next year? Does it languish in a drawer until you come across it in a few months' time? Perhaps you have a very particular place for it? For me I kept my poppy in my Mission desk drawer ready to be pulled out for the next Remembrance Day service. Although sometimes I would forget it was there and buy a new one which would then join the other poppies in my drawer. When I left the Mission earlier this year I had quite a drawer full of poppies, I am a very forgetful person! Sometimes I do the same with goodness God has shown me. I file all God's acts of goodness away in a drawer of my memory and quickly forget about them. Like the poppies in my desk drawer the collection grows until something happens and I am forced to open the draw of my memory and acknowledge all the goodness God has done for me. I do not believe I am alone in forgetting the goodness of God.

If we are so forgetful of God's goodness, there are things that instead of forgetting them, letting them go, we insist on keeping them in mind. We should forget them; we should throw them in the wastepaper bin of our memories. Memories like those sorrows that linger, those hurtful words spoken in anger or all those memories of our failures and sins. We know we should forget them or let them go but instead we pin on the notice board of memory, in plain view so we cannot help but remember them. We are forced time and time again to acknowledge those memories with all their pain, suffering, guilt and shame. We are a contrary people forgetting what we should remember and remembering what we should forget.

**Psalm 77** shows a writer who is in real anguish and distress. He says he will cry to the Lord because he knows God will hear him. In the day of his trouble he seeks the Lord. However, he does not feel comforted, "*My soul refuses to rest*", and when he remembers the Lord he moans, and his spirit grows faints.

What is the problem here? Well, he is remembering the wrong things, the ones pinned up on the notice board of his memory. These are the memories that should have been forgotten but hadn't and now they were leading him into despair. These were the memories that lingered in his mind, in his soul, they are wearing him out, they become

burdensome to his heart. They led him to question God's goodness, they led him to fear God had abandoned him. He writes about his fears, *"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favourable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"*

Fortunately, the Psalmist realizes he is looking at the wrong memories. He is looking at those memories he should have let go of but instead pinned to the notice board of his memory. What he must do is actually to remember, recall, be reminded of the goodness of God. He writes *"Let me remember my song in the night... let me meditate in my heart. Then my spirit made a diligent search"*.

What he does next is to relevant to us. He begins to remember or meditate on God's goodness. The psalmist stops thinking about all those memories that should have been forgotten and begins to think those memories he has forgotten, memories of God's goodness to him. The writer thinks about all the times God provided for Him and His people in their time of need. He makes an abridged description of one particular episode, the parting of the Red Sea. That was a time of need, those were dire straits. No escape, no hope, no deliverance....unless it came from the Lord. Yet the writer remembers God's goodness in delivering His people. As he remembers God goodness his doubt turns to trust, fear turns to faith and he realises that God is a great and good God who will save and lead him and his people in their time of need. Remembering God's past goodness's to us gives hope for today and tomorrow because God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. God is unchanging; as He was yesterday, He will be today and tomorrow. If God showed His goodness to you yesterday, He will show His goodness to you today and tomorrow. The author of Hebrews writes this about Jesus Christ who was God made manifest, **Hebrews 13: 8** *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

The Psalmist is careful to avoid the trap of living in the past. He doesn't think oh everything was better then; he doesn't pine for a golden past. His remembering and mediation on his memories of God's goodness allays his fears for today and gives him hope for the future, a future filled with the goodness of God. Remembering God's goodness is sustenance for the mind and soul.

Now, if we, like the Psalmist use the past like the rear-view mirror in the car that's a positive way to remember things. When you drive, you'd look every so often to what is past you, but your main focus is on now and on what lays ahead of you.

From Psalm 77 we learn how to use our memory, especially in times of need. The psalmist writes *"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples."* Like the Psalmist we are to remember the goodness God has already done in our lives. We are to remember and carefully think about God's goodness to us. But there is a note of caution here. All our remembering and meditations about God goodness is to be done in the light of His Word. We are not to rely solely on our memories, that is dangerous. No, we are to carefully think about the memories of God's goodness to other people which is recorded in His Word. When we look to God's Word, we see His wonders, and His deeds, and His care and His comfort for others we see God's goodness once more. In God's word we are confronted once more with the Goodness of God.

God's own memory is interesting when it comes to our sin. When there is repentance and faith, he forgives and forgets. God keeps no archive or backup of our sins, no are completely and irrevocably forgotten and erased. God choses to forget our sins. **Jeremiah 31: 34** *"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"*. However, God's memory is perfect when it comes to keeping His promises. He always remembers to offer us grace, peace and a new beginning in His love. We frail human people know that it is hard sometimes to forget what we should and to remember what we must. However, God chooses to forget our sins and to remembers to show His goodness to us.

Psalm 77 is a reminder that faith includes having a good memory. Faith includes remembering the goodness of the Lord. Living daily with Him in faith is like using the rear-view mirror. We look into the past, but we don't dwell in it. We keep looking forward, we walk forward, we walk towards the eternal life, where no memory of the

times of trouble will last. We look confidently into the future because of God's goodness that lies behind us. Then, we realize we are called daily, by faith in Jesus to remember... the future.