

Let Us Remember
Matthew 25:1-13 and Psalm 78:1-8
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You may thank me after the service for not having us listen to all of Psalm 78 instead of just the first eight verses. It is a very long psalm and God only knows in what condition would be the food for our reception if we went on that long. But that is not why you should thank me. You should thank me because you didn't have to listen to the recitation of your sins and the consequences of committing them. Of course, they are not *your* sins specifically, but they are the sins of us all, remembered through the life and history of a certain "stubborn and rebellious generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God." Mostly the sins recounted in Psalm 78 are the sins of idolatry, of not trusting that the God who had brought a people up out of slavery could then sustain them in a desert. And those are our sins too, for even in the best of generations, that is the true character of our sin, hearts and spirits not living up to our noble calling. This unfaithfulness is characterized in the psalm tonight as the sin of forgetting, and hence the words we heard tonight, a call to remember and to teach the next generation, and every generation to come, about "the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done...so that they should set their hope on God and not forget the works of God."

Forgetting is so easy, isn't it? Especially when it shields us from our pain, or when it makes our lives less complicated, or when it allows us to conveniently overlook our responsibilities to one another or the planet. You've heard the old saying that "those who forget history are doomed to repeat it," and we've seen how that's true, time and time again. I was just in Washington D.C. this week and visited the War Memorial dedicated to those men and women from the District of Columbia who lost their lives in the First World War. But the monument was made before 1939 and so the stone is inscribed as dedicated to those who died in *The* World War, not the First World War, inscribed by people who could not imagine that we could ever do that to ourselves yet again. And yet in less than a generation, there we were right back at it again, forgetting, or simply ignoring, the lessons we should have learned at the cost of so many millions of lives. Every generation, it seems, forgets what the one before it so painfully learned, and so the cycle continues, generation after generation after generation. And what did Einstein say was the definition of insanity? "To do the same thing again and again and expect a different result." We are an insane people because the list of wars grows with every passing decade, and families in every corner of the world continue to grieve for the sons and daughters who never came back, and for those who did but with scars of all kinds. We keep forgetting to put our trust in God rather than in our own efforts, and the result is always, painfully, the same.

It is perfectly appropriate to remember in the way we do tonight, remembering those who have served in their nations' militaries, remembering those who waited and hoped and prayed for them back home. They are the ones who have made our remembering possible. They are the ones who have made our worship possible. They are the ones who have made whatever prosperity we enjoy possible. They are the ones who have borne the sins of our forgetting on their bodies and in their psyches and in their spirits. It is not only appropriate that we remember, but it is imperative. It is imperative because if we can't remember the living, breathing people who served, how much easier would it be in each generation to forget the horrors we've already inflicted upon ourselves? If there has been any restraint in our collective nations' insanity, surely it has been the human lives of those we remember tonight.

And yet if we stop with remembering the service and sacrifice of those who answered their nations' calls to duty, we will be committing the same sin of which God's people are accused in the Psalm, of forgetting God in the midst of their fear and insecurity. It is not remembering God to claim that God was on our side in our conflicts, and that's why we won. It is not remembering God to place a cross or a crescent or a star of David on a dead soldier's grave. It is not remembering God to call out the sins of other nations while forgetting our own nations' shortcomings. No, the remembering God is calling us to do in Psalm 78 is of a different kind, the kind that leads to avoiding war in the first place, rather than having to remember it

later with monuments that show us our foolishness. The remembering we are called to is the kind represented by those five wise bridesmaids Jesus described, the ones who could be not only vigilant but fully prepared for the task to which they were called. All ten waited, but only the faithful five were prepared, only the faithful five had followed the instructions to remember, for as long as it takes. Only the faithful five could the wedding banquet.

And so, tonight, even as we remember our veterans and their families, let us also remember the God who gave them to us to, not only as warriors but more importantly as spouses and children and grandparents.

Let us remember God by doing right by those who have served once they have come home, by caring for them unconditionally in mind, body, and spirit.

Let us remember God by living into the image in which we were created, not for war and destruction and chaos, but for life and creativity and cooperation.

Let us remember God by caring for all that God has provided, such abundance for all we need that there need never be another war, anywhere, anytime.

Let us remember God by humbly admitting that it is entirely possible that we are not on God's side after all, at least not all the time.

Let us remember God by honoring those whose voices called us to stop and think about what we were about to do, or were already doing, those who called us to examine our consciences, and our motives, and our allegiances.

And perhaps most importantly, let us remember God by celebrating that, just like those Israelites wandering around in the desert, God hasn't given up on us even in the midst of our greatest idolatry, our worst forgetting, and our feeblest attempts at remembering. That's called grace, my friends, and it is the true shape of our remembrance. It's what's embodied in a man who could have rallied troops for war, but who chose a different path, a path that remembered God and remembered just how valuable is every human life. God remembered us with the gift of Jesus Christ. May we remember God by being the heart, hands, and voice of Christ, and teaching the next generation how to do the same. Amen.