

What are we forgetting about our past that we MUST remember to preserve our future?

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The apostle Paul was not with the disciples at the Last Supper because at the time he was still Saul and ready to persecute the followers of Jesus. He had to be told later what happened there and what it meant. Using that memory, he passed it on here to the fledgling church at Corinth -- and eventually to us today. Accurate memory, thus, becomes a channel of grace, the vehicle through which, what became the Christian church, learned about what became one of its primary sacraments.

The church today is shaped by memory and the faithful handing down of tradition. What would the church look like today if Christians began forgetting about, or misremembering, the Exodus, the Last Supper, or the first Easter.

Americans are Forgetting the Holocaust

A newly released survey commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which represents the world's Jews in negotiating compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi atrocities and their heirs, revealed widespread ignorance of the Holocaust among Americans. The results showed that many Americans severely underestimate the number of Jews killed during Hitler's Nazi regime. Also, many were ignorant to the fact that Hitler was democratically elected, and nearly half did not recognize the name "Auschwitz" as a Nazi death camp.

These polling results have appalled many Jews and others. The obligation to remember runs deep in Judaism. For instance, the Hebrew scriptures again and again retell the story of the Exodus as a way of reminding the people of Israel what God already has done for them. A similar attachment to the importance of memory is also found in Christianity. Followers of Christ, for example, participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion as a way of obeying

Jesus' instruction to "do this in remembrance of me." Beyond that, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas and All Saints' Day are rooted in the importance of remembering.

In a recent interview on National Public Radio, Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt, author of *Denying The Holocaust: The Growing Assault On Truth And Memory*, explained why she thinks remembering history is so important: "History shapes people's view of the present. I'm not saying that history always repeats itself or history's always the same. But if you don't know what came before, it's very hard to make wise decisions for the future."

The recent forgetting may be having an effect on increasing evidence of hatred toward Jews. According to the FBI, of hate crimes in the United States motivated by religious bias, Jews remain the most frequent victims, more than double that of the next largest group. Nor is this a problem only in the United States, but worldwide. For example, violent attacks on Jews almost doubled last year over the previous year.

There are Holocaust museums and related educational centers in many places around the country. They exist in part to prevent the kind of results this new poll has turned up. For the reality is that if we don't know history, we don't really know who we are. This means that Christians need to know the history of their own faith tradition -- both the joyful and the deplorable. For instance, when it comes to the Holocaust, Christians have an obligation to understand that the centuries-long church policies of promoting anti-Judaism helped to create the atmosphere of hatred in which modern antisemitism could take root in the mid-1800s and persists today.

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Micah 6:4

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (For context, read 6:1-5.)

In this passage, God challenges Israel to remember history. As it says in the latter part of verse 2 of Micah 6, "the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel." So what does God do? God tells the people of Israel to remember who they are. Rely on the memory of being in Egypt, of being freed from slavery, of the roles played by Moses and his siblings.

If you remember who you are and where you came from, God says in verse 5, "you may know the saving acts of the LORD." It's one of dozens of times in the Hebrew scriptures that the people of Israel are told not to forget their history.

Questions: What does Israel's history of being freed from Egypt mean to Christians today? In what way do Christians today forget their own history and thus, in some way, trivialize or take for granted their relationship with God? From what slavery do you need to be freed?

Ezra 3:10-12

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and given thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy. (No context needed.)

When King Cyrus the Great released the people of Israel from captivity and sent them back to Jerusalem, they got busy rebuilding the destroyed temple. But some of those who came back to Israel remembered the old temple and their memories made them weep, even in the midst of joy about a rebuilt temple, proving again that though memory is important it often is accompanied by pain.

Questions: When has change in the church caused you to weep because you remembered fondly (maybe too fondly) what had gone before? Were your memories accurate or merely an idealized picture marinated in nostalgia for some imagined good old days?

Prayer for Guidance (BCP p.832)

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with *thy* most gracious favor, and further us with *thy* continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in *thee*, we may glorify *thy* holy Name, and finally, by *thy* mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.