

ESCHATOLOGICAL MEMORY

This is the fourth installment on the holiness of memory. As always, if you have any questions or would like to further discuss any *Vicar's Voice* themes, my door is always open.

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*"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go [home]" – Mark 2.11*

*"This I do in quiet ways, that on your lonely path, you may not walk alone." – Howard Thurman*

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The term: "salvation" is often a word that we can't wrap our minds around, a lofty and untouchable idea. Its origin comes from the Greek word: *sōzō*, which basically means healing, curing, and restoration. Being human, we cross into a healing, restorative end time (eschaton; *pronounced: esk-ă-tŏn*) when we step outside our comfort zone, walk with the forgetful through what's left of their memory, and encourage them to "take up their mat and walk away from the healing pool." The edges of our comfort zone can also be crossed when we carry our forgetful and forgotten neighbor to the healing pool through memory. It's risky and can even be dangerous to move outside our comfort zone, to be with those who exist at or beyond the borders of memory loss, but doing this we can mend broken relationships with the marginalized forgotten ones. When we talk with or relate to a person with Alzheimer's, we enter uncharted waters and may move outside our mental comfort zone into their reality. It's in these moments of forgetful weakness that we meet the power of God.

Rev. Eileen Shamy, teacher and Methodist Pastor, believes that an essential principle in caring for those who forget is to join them in their reality instead of arguing with them and confronting them with our mental reality. Rev. Roxanne Miller-Sinclair cites a chaplain's rephrasing of this principle: "once [he] realizes that a person with Alzheimer's dementia is unable to deal with reality, then he makes what I believe is the crucial step, 'then I will work at entering their delusion.'" Entering their delusion really means moving into the margins where they exist as previously mentioned. At this margin, reality is twisted and memories are difficult to grasp, but liberation from being alone are possible by remembering them and their memories. Memory here becomes the hope against all hope. Hope in a restored memory in the resurrected end time (eschaton) supports an image of heaven where God's memory never fails. In remembering all of humanity, especially those who are often forgotten, God holds them close to God's bosom when they are remembered.

Eschatological memory breaks open the moment and carries into the present and future what has passed, giving meaning to the present and future. By remembering those with Alzheimer's dementia and their memories, there is a momentary reversal of the natural decline of the memory functions because they are brought out of their forgetting state and reminded of their own life. Remembering their memories reconnects, even if it's for a moment, to what they have lost be it personal awareness, self-pride, or the simple joys of life. The women at the tomb did not forget the cry of abandonment felt within their community and remembered Jesus, not letting go of the responsibilities of remembering him. For them the cross was not closure, just as forgetting and mental inabilities are not the death of the family member with Alzheimer's. Their memory can be resurrected and carried into the end times, the climax of history (eschaton) by listening to their stories and then telling their stories back to them as they enter the latter stages of Alzheimer's and dementia.

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*God of memory, as we reach forward for your supporting hands, allow us to remember those who forget. May we be the healing carriers of their forgotten stories, so that we can all celebrate your presence with us throughout time. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*