

Before I came to St. Mark, I did pastoral care with elderly adults at various stages of Alzheimer's and dementia. Over my time ministering with them, I realized that memory is a very important aspect of our culture and it has been since the beginning of humankind. Stories we tell remind us of where we've come from, where we are now, and where we're going. Memory and stories are essential in the life of a congregation and I believe remembering is holy, even sacramental. It's often tough to feel God working in the lives of family and friends who forget. Perhaps it's even harder to experience God through the blessed frustration that comes with caring for others who forget. I have been asked to reflect on memory and stories through a series of *Vicar's Voice* articles in the Memo's. This month will begin the installment reflecting on various types of memory and their holiness. 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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*Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'* – Luke 23:42-43

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

A Christ-centered understanding of memory can be taken from the memory of God through Jesus the Christ. Jesus, being God in the flesh, used memory in a way that honored those around him. Through his invitation to remember him every time Holy Communion is celebrated, Jesus set up the view of memory that goes beyond time, space, and all human understanding. Jesus used a reminiscing memory to remind humanity that in our daily trials and even on our death bed we will be remembered.

As the hour of Jesus' glorification came, he encountered human memory and its finite limits first hand. When the cries for remembrance pierced the ear of God, the grace-filled exchange between Jesus and the criminal on the cross is better understood. In Luke 23.42-43 one of the criminals pleads for Jesus to remember him when entering into his kingdom and Jesus reassures the convict that he will be with him in Paradise. Jesus' reassurance crossed the reality of their time into a promise of memory in the next life. Christ here is a, if not *the*, vehicle for transporting the divine memory into the realized kingdom of God. While we do not know if the criminal was in fact remembered when Christ entered into his reign, as Christians we believe that he was remembered through faith because of the good news that Jesus proclaimed while on earth. When we confess that God remembers, we affirm that God is faithful in the promises that have been established with Abraham and Sarah, and following generations throughout the Old Testament.

It is also noticed that Jesus' disoriented lament in Matthew 27.46, "...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is an interweaving of God's divine memory and Jesus' human memory, which are one. This union of memories evokes a sense of God feeling forgotten, a terrifying abandonment on the cross. God identifies with us when we begin to forget, feeling isolated from the world and abandoned by friends and family. The mental deterioration by diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia can leave elderly adults crying out in the same way Christ cried out from the cross. Their inability to remember is a type of crucifixion that can lead to a slow, agonizing death. However, Christ's experience of this feeling of being forgotten can reassure those of us who transition from middle-stage Alzheimer's to end-stage that Christ is with us, that Christ understands what we will experience, and that Christ remembers us in his salvific resurrection. Jesus felt forgotten on the cross and yet was remembered in the same moment. When God's fidelity in memory is proclaimed, God's sustaining love is lifted up and God's presence is remembered.

*Merciful God, as we forget and care for those who forget, may you lift us up as one body, whole, to see you face-to-face and feel your eternal loving embrace. In Jesus name, Amen.*