

PASTORAL MEMORY

This is the sixth (and final) 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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*"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." – John 10:27*

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

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Alzheimer's dementia upsets biblical stories, returning what is orderly, like our life stories, to the chaos of the deep. Dr. David Keck, professor at Ateneo de Manilla University in the Philippines, believes that we are our memories; however, without memories we are only physical resemblances of who we suppose ourselves to be. Rev. Karen Scheib agrees that we are not simply what we remember, but believes that we are also what others remember of us, especially what God remembers. How or what God remembers of us is connected to God's very presence, grace, and mercy that is expressed through God's divine memory.

Caregivers can offer meaning and joy in the middle of forgetfulness and isolation when they not only remember those with Alzheimer's, but also their memories. When we remember their memories, we can resurrect and restore them from the broken reality that has closed them off to their past by transporting them to times and places where they can reminisce. It is the responsibility of caregivers to listen to the stories of those to whom and with whom they care for because there may come a time in the person's life then they can no longer remember their own story and it becomes crucial for a caregiver to give honor and dignity to the person's story. This manifests itself when we as caregivers tell people their own stories as a way of restoring them even if it is only for moments.

With the understanding that all of us belong to one if not multiple communities, there is a desire to push back against the culture of individualism which is characteristic of the age we live in as mentioned in the last month's article. Father Robert Petite, Chaplain at a retirement community in Chicago, believes that a group's collective memory is called into action when one of its members can no longer remember for him/herself. He feels that when the community remembers for the individual, then the community is once again whole. Rev. Roxanne Miller-Sinclair, who is also a chaplain, attributes this same re-remembering quality to God. She writes, "We believe in a God who re-members us by remembering us. This is a God who takes all the parts and fragments of our lives and makes them into a story." This is our human story that is remembered in the resurrection, sabbatical, eschatological, and ecclesiological memory.

One final idea to think about is: as God remembers there is an implied movement of God toward the object of God's memory. It is in this movement where God's caring, delivering, and liberating actions are evident in the world. Part of our action in remembering *for* someone, as is true for God, is intentional listening to someone's stories. God hears and listens to our cries of lament and our shouts of thanksgiving. Therefore, God knows our hearts and remembers us.

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*God of remembrance, you have commanded us to love one another as you have loved us. Remind us that loving others includes listening to their stories. Make our hearts full of compassion for all of your flock who do indeed have stories to share and grant us the willingness to remember the stories of those who forget. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*