

ECCLESIOLOGICAL MEMORY

This is the fifth installment on the holiness of memory. Ecclesiology (ecclesi-ology) means the study of (-ology) the church (*ecclesia*), but is often used to describe the realm or reach of the church. We get the word “church” from the Greek word *ekklesia*. 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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*“Woman, behold your son.” Then [Jesus] says to the disciple: “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home.” – John 19.26-27*

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

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The church is the inheritors of memories of the past and as heirs it’s also our responsibility to pass on memories. This occurs when the church becomes the storyteller, collector, or photographer of histories. Joy Philip, Ph.D student at LSTC, suggests, “Heirs have the responsibility to ensure that their inheritance is passed on.” The church, as the community of believers, remembers culture and traditions from generations past. With an ability to remember, the church can also remember its members and their memories, passing those along to later generations of believers. Caregivers of elderly adults with Alzheimer’s are called to do this same passing of the inheritance when they remember those to whom they care for. Dr. Stephen Sapp, Associate Professor of Religious studies at the University of Miami, Florida, speaks to this communal memory: “Caregivers can be not only givers of care, but bestowers of a kind of immortality by recalling for others around them what the person with Alzheimer’s disease no longer can recall in order to strengthen the remembering of that person and to keep his or her role in the story of the community alive in the corporate memory.”

Within the function of the church, remembering as part of liturgy and worship is foundational in keeping alive the memory of those gathered, past and present, and is a stand in unity with all those people whose names are written in the book of life. The church in its communal nature has a responsibility to remember its members and the “others” who are not members, especially those in the community who have been forgotten because they forget. Dr. Sapp goes on to say that “the collective memory tradition is central to our Jewish-Christian faith as a self-understanding” and is significant in Lutheranism as the sacrament of Holy Communion is precisely a collective belief in the real presence of Jesus Christ through the remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection.

Methodist Pastor Eileen Shamy references that in baptism the congregation makes a promise to provide for the spiritual well-being and faith nurture of the newly baptized member. In making the promise, there is no designated maximum age which ends this promise. When baptized members can no longer remember for themselves, then it becomes the responsibility of the faith family to remember for them. She points out that, “as children of a compassionate God, we are called to love our neighbor and it’s our task to re-member each person into the place where she or he truly belongs, into the community of God’s people.” You see the church is made up of you and me and we are entrusted to care for every member, whether they can remember or not. And it’s through the family of God, the church, that Jesus takes care of and remembers us!

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*God of stories, you have called us into one body, the church, through your Son Jesus as our head. Grant us the courage to lift up in prayer and thanksgiving those who forget, so that we can embody your restoring remembrance. In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen.*