

**How Could We Forget?  
Deuteronomy 8:11-20**

They say, whoever *they* are, that older people are forgetful. The fact of the matter is, forgetfulness is a universal trait of the human race, especially in regards to God. How could we forget God? How could we forget to give credit where credit is due? It sounds incredible. It must sound incredible to God as well. Listen to God speaking through the prophets:

**“Young women don't forget their jewelry, do they? Brides don't show up without their veils, do they? But my people forget me. Day after day after day they never give me a thought.”<sup>i</sup>**

**“Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, walk away from the baby she bore? But even if mothers forget, I'd never forget you — never.”<sup>ii</sup>**

**“I took care of you, took care of all your needs, gave you everything you needed. You were spoiled. You thought you didn't need me. You forgot me.”<sup>iii</sup>**

How could we? Our scripture passage this morning gives us a couple of clues.

PROSPERITY makes us forgetful. The more we have, the more we are apt to forget God. You'd think it would be the other way around – the more we have, the more grateful we would be. But gratitude always seems to be inversely proportional to our possessions. Ask those who have gone on mission trips to poverty-stricken areas. They often return with reports about the fervent faith they found among believers, in sharp contrast with the complacency and self-centeredness of those of us who have so much.

While wandering through the wilderness, en route to the promised land, Moses gave fair warning that it could be like that. **“When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...”<sup>iv</sup>**

Possessions, in and of themselves, are not evil. But they always vie for our attention, even our ultimate attention. That's why Jesus had so many strong warnings about wealth. **“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also ... you cannot serve God and money ... it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>v</sup>**

I realize that there aren't too many of us in this room who would admit that we fall into that category. After all, the market is down and the price of oil is up, up and away. Our worries about not having enough are more likely to cause us to forget God. Right?

Wrong! Everything is relative and compared with most of the world, we are surfeited in wealth, no matter how much we feel we're over taxed and no matter what recession may or may not loom on the horizon.

There is a helpful prayer in the Book of Proverbs that brings balance into our lives: **"I ask you, God, to let me have two things before I die: keep me from lying, and let me be neither rich nor poor. So give me only as much food as I need. If I have more, I might say that I do not need you. But if I am poor, I might steal and bring disgrace on my God."**<sup>vi</sup>

PRIDE is the other clue. We forget that it is God who has made us, and not we ourselves!<sup>vii</sup> We take great pride in our being "self-made people." "I MADE MONEY THE OLD FASHIONED WAY – I EARNED IT! We ridicule the poor by boasting how we pulled ourselves up by our own boot straps, but never acknowledge who gave us the boot straps in the first place.

I was in the home of a young family some time ago. Noticing the beautiful furnishings, the gadgets, the swimming pool, and their general life-style, I couldn't help but say to them, "You kids really are very fortunate at such a young age." The young woman responded, "my husband works hard!" I was looking for a gentle note of grace, instead I heard the harsh noise of pride.

Once again we were warned that it could be like that. **"Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth..."**<sup>viii</sup>

Frederick D. Huntington was an Episcopal bishop in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote: "It is not scientific doubt, nor atheism, nor pantheism, not agnosticism, that in our day and in this land is likely to quench the light of the gospel. It is a proud, sensuous, selfish, luxurious, church-going, hallow-hearted prosperity." That may seem to you as an overstatement. I only wish it was. He lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I can only wonder what he'd say about the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

How could we forget God? The more important question is "how do we remember?" Once again, our passage points the way: **"Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today."** We forget because we do not do what God wants. We have our own agenda – we have our money, our might and our weapons. God suddenly falls into the background.

How does God want us to live. Listen carefully to these words that the choirs will sing in a moment:

Hold fast to what is good, hold fast to what is true. Come and laugh with those

who laugh, Also weep with those who weep. So far as it may depend on you, live peaceably now with all. Let love be ever true, hold fast to what is good.

Bless even those who persecute you, render no evil for evil. Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all who pass your way. If your enemy is hungry, give him food and relieve his thirst. Be aglow in the Spirit, serve the Lord.<sup>ix</sup>

What helps us to even begin to live like that is to practice the disciplines of the Christian life. Those disciplines are multi-faceted, but at a minimum they should include regular public worship, active participation in the life of the church, stewardship of our time, talents and money, personal prayer, study of the Scriptures and trying to live as they teach.

Fred Craddock, is a Disciples of Christ pastor and a renowned teacher of preachers. He tells the story of visiting in a small hospital in a rural community in Georgia. Patients in that hospital are usually quite elderly, but this day there was much excitement because a baby had just been born. Craddock saw a young man with a worrisome look staring through the glass of the nursery and knew it must be the father. When Craddock walked up to him, he heard the infant crying almost hard enough to turn herself inside out.

He said to the young father, "Don't worry; that's what new baby's do; it's good for their lungs." The father replied, "I'm not worried. She's mad as all get out." "Why do you think she's mad?" Craddock queried. "Wouldn't you be mad if one moment you were with God and in the next moment you find yourself in Georgia?" "Really? Do you think your daughter remembers God?" "Yes," the father answered. "And it's up to me and my wife and the church never to let her forget God."<sup>x</sup>

That's our job as the church – to help each other, and the world, to remember God and that God made us and not we ourselves.

#### Endnotes

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- i. Jeremiah 2:32 *The Message*
  - ii. Isaiah 49:15 *The Message*
  - iii. Hosea 13:6 *The Message*
  - iv. Deuteronomy 8:12-14
  - v. Matthew 5-7, etc.

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- vi. Proverbs 30:7-9
  - vii. Psalm 100:3, *King James Version*
  - viii. Deuteronomy 8:17-18
  - ix. *Hold Fast To What Is Good*, by John Purifoy
  - x. Told in a lecture at the Winter Pastor's School at Stetson University, January, 2001