

Covenant Word

Remember

Luke 2:1-14

A Message by
The Reverend Sarah
Jackson Shelton
Pastor
Sunday
December 24, 2007

Just before Thanksgiving, my sister, Mary Helen slipped me a DVD. She said that the DVD contained pictures of her children when they were young and that my boys might get a kick out of watching. Prone to follow the advice of my older sister, we sat down after our turkey and dressing and watched.

Not only were there birthday parties for Joe and Margaret. There were

beach trips and Easter egg hunts and Christmas celebrations. In particular, I watched as a Christmas unfolded that was in the house of my childhood here in Birmingham. I was a seminary student home for Christmas break. For gifts, I had made red corduroy skirts for all the women in the family and red corduroy vests for all the men. Good sports that they were, they all wore them to church and then home for our celebration! My boys giggled at the crimson parade we made as we each made a dramatic entrance into the living room for the exchanging of gifts.

I was surprised by the emotions that welled up in me as I watched each face and heard their voices on our TV. It was the first time that Lloyd, Dan and David had seen or heard my mother except for some still photos that we have. My parents looked so young, when I had thought of them, at the time, as being so old. Then, the hard reality hit that in those pictures, my parents were not much older than I am now! It was more than a stepping back in time. It was the opening of a door to a room full of memories that were begging to have the dust and cobwebs wiped off their surface.

Frederick Buechner says: Every person we have ever known, every place we have ever seen, everything that has ever happened to us—it all lives and breathes deep in us somewhere whether we like it or not, and sometimes it doesn't take much to bring it back to the surface in bits and pieces: a scrap of some song that was popular years

ago; a book we read as a child; a stretch of road we used to travel; an old photograph; an old letter. There is no telling what trivial thing may do it, and then, suddenly, there it all is...something that happened to us once...and it is there not just as a picture on the wall to stand back from and gaze at, but as a reality we are so much a part of still and that is still so much a part of us that we feel with something close to its original intensity and freshness what it felt like, say, to fall in love at the age of sixteen, or to smell the smells and hear the sounds of a house that has long since disappeared, or to laugh till the tears ran down our cheeks with somebody who died more years ago than we can easily count or for whom, in every way that matters, we might as well have died years ago ourselves. Old failures, old hurts. Times too beautiful to tell or too terrible. Memories come at us helter-skelter and unbidden, sometimes so thick and fast that they are more than we can handle in their poignancy, sometimes so sparsely that we

all but cry out to remember more. ("A Room Called Remember")

I believe the wonder of Christmas encourages these memories. It provides us a safe pause to open the door to remember.

Kathryn Tucker Windham remembers the Christmas she wanted a red scooter. A little girl in town had a scooter and she was the envy of all the other children. They would gather at the Methodist church to watch her ride. This child wasn't prone to let anyone else take a turn to ride and if she did allow you to ride, there were so many rules to attend to that it was hardly worth it. So Kathryn set her heart on receiving a red scooter of her own for Christmas.

Now Kathryn was a believer in the magic of Christmas. In fact, she believed so completely that she did not think it necessary to communicate to anyone else that her heart's desire was a red scooter. If he saw you when you were sleeping and knew when you were awake, he surely knew that Kathryn wanted a red scooter. In her mind, it was a done deal.

Her parents, however, were sadly unaware and uninformed. So on Christmas morning, Kathryn's parents were horrified to discover a gravely disappointed daughter. As the truth surfaced, it was not long before her father stepped out for awhile. When he returned, Kathryn overheard him say to her mother, "There's not a one in the city!" Soon, she heard him on the telephone, "Yes, I know it's Christmas. Why else do you think I would be calling?"

Dear Friends,
Thank you for wanting to read and study these thoughts more carefully. Please know that I do not take full credit for anything that may be contained within, because I may have read or heard something at some point during my pilgrimage and do not remember its source and thus, cannot give the rightful author his/her credit. I pray that you will find inspiration and encouragement.
Sarah Shelton



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Covenant

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Worship with us each Sunday
morning at 9 a.m. and
for Bible study at 10:30 a.m.

The day wore on. Eventually, Kathryn joined up with her friends to play with one another's toys. Her family ended their day by gathering for a big dinner. As was often their practice, after dinner, Kathryn's father suggested a walk to town in order to watch as the evening train came through. Kathryn got her coat and hat and held her father's hand as they walked all the way to the train station without exchanging a word. Kathryn was still heavy with her grief, and her father was sensitive enough to respect it.

Once they arrived at the train station, they did not have to wait long. The train was running right on time, and as the train came through, the conductor waved at Kathryn and her father from the caboose. "Well Kathryn," her father said, "I guess that's it. I guess that's the end to our Christmas day." As Kathryn started to agree, they realized that the train had stopped and was beginning to back down the tracks. As the caboose lined up with the platform, the conductor came down the steps. "Are you Miss Kathryn Tucker, young lady? We had a late delivery for you from the North Pole!" In his hands was a red scooter.

Kathryn says that she and her father went to the Methodist church, and she rode that scooter round and round the church. Her father never said, "It's getting late." He never said, "ok, one last time." He never said, "It's cold out here." He just stood and watched as his child's dream come true.

Fred Craddock remembers a Christmas of his childhood during the Depression. He said that they were incredibly poor living on a farm in Appalachia, but everyone else was poor too. It was the only redeeming thing about the Depression. No one had much, so it was not noticeable when you did not have anything either. But during Christmas, Fred felt as if their poorness showed up grievously.

Passing through the house one day, Fred overheard his mother say to his father: "It looks like the kids won't have anything for Christmas this year." It was a terrible thing to overhear especially since the five Craddock children were of an age where they had just barely moved beyond believing. They were just sort of wishing on a star. You see, they had always had a little something to keep their hope alive...an orange, apple, raisins still on the stem, those kinds of things. But this year, it looked like they weren't going to have anything at all.

So on Christmas morning, Fred got up expecting nothing. He had not shared the news with his siblings, so he steeled himself for the disappointment of the other four. When he came into the main part of their house, he saw that the fire had already been built, and on the hearth were five shoe boxes. One for each child. Inside each shoe box, there was an apple, an orange, a tangerine, raisins still on the stem, a package of sparklers, a five shot Roman candle and a stick of peppermint candy. It was enough to make anyone believe in the magic of Christmas, especially in light of what he had overheard. "It looks like the kids won't have a Christmas this year," his mother had said to

his father. Yet there were the five boxes full of enviable gifts.

For a long time, his mother never told how they came to have such an abundant Christmas. But years later when Fred had begun to wonder if his father had broken the law in order to

provide his five children with a Christmas, she finally confessed how it had come to be.

The father had served in World War I, and during his time in the army, the army dentist had repaired all of his teeth. The

Dad's back teeth were all crowned in gold. So when his children were threatened with nothing with which to celebrate Christmas, he took the pliers and with a piece of wood as leverage, he pulled the gold crown off of one of his teeth. He took the gold crown to town, where a jeweler weighed the gold and gave him the money in order to fill the five boxes and give his children Christmas. Now Craddock's father was an alcoholic. He was not able to keep a job and so Craddock says of this: "It added a great deal to the memory of my father who never spoke of it."

It seems to me that the challenge of Christmas is to purposefully remember these stories. It is to enter that still room within us where the past lives on as a part of the present, where the dead are alive again, where we are most alive ourselves to the long journey of life, with all of its twists and turns, that brings us to destinations of the heart. To remember is to realize that we have not traveled through this life alone. We could never have gotten this far if we had only had ourselves.

So we pause to check-in with the faces of those who lent us their courage or bolstered us with encouragement or who sacrificed some part of themselves so that we might be better persons than we dreamed ourselves capable. It is also to come to grips that when we were the most frail or undependable or most despicable that there was One who never left our sides. So to remember the past is to see that we are here tonight by God's grace and the fact that each day is a Divine gift. (Buechner)

So to remember the past is to see that we are here tonight by God's grace and the fact that each day is a Divine gift.

The psalmist David says that we are to "remember the wonderful works that He has done." So we remember what God has done in the lives of each of us. We remember what God has done in the life of the world. We remember what God has done in Christ and how Christ continues to be born into our lives under the countless disguises of people who, in one way or another, strengthened us, comforted us, healed us, and judged us, by the power of Christ that was alive within them. All of this is what there is to remember. And *because* that is the past, *because* we remember, we have this high and holy hope: that what God has done, God will continue to do. That what He has begun in us and our world, God will, in unimaginable ways, bring to fullness

and fruition the Kingdom for which wait.

<Go down>

On this holiest of nights, we remember
a baby being born in a manger, his life
of ministry and teaching, and we
remember his sacrificial death.

Ultimately, it is Christ
that calls us to
remember, for when he
sat at the supper to eat
with his disciples what
was to become their last
meal, He took bread
and broke it, saying
“This is my broken
body. Take and eat *and
as you do it, remember
me.*”

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We gather about Your table, oh Lord,
and remember how You, through Your
life and death, have given us purpose,
surrounded us with comfort, taught us
to love one another, forgiven us of
even the smallest of our sins, and we
are filled with gratitude.

As we remember Your birth, we pray
that You will be born in us anew so
that with the angels, we might sing,
“Glory to God in the highest and on
earth, peace, good will to all persons
everywhere.”

Bless now this meal and to each who
will partake, give the assurance of your
salvation as we remember. Amen.