

“Not forgotten”

June 1, 2008

Text: Genesis 9:8-17, Philippians 4:10-14

I.

Always, it seems, we live in complicated times ... with challenges on our plate, both anticipated and unanticipated.

Clearly, for example, the gas crisis could have been *anticipated*. We've known for decades that one day our demand for oil was going to pose a problem.

And of course, with the huge emphasis in ethanol production from corn, the recent rise in food prices is not unrelated to gas prices. When the price of one primary grain goes up, as with corn, it ends up affecting the entire food industry.

Anticipated, too, was the home mortgage crisis, along with the consequent thousands of foreclosures nation wide. We knew there were greedy winds blowing out there and that—if we tell the truth—it was only a matter of time. We knew; all kinds of people knew.

II.

In the *unanticipated* column, I don't think any of us thought, five years ago, that we'd still be in Iraq ... continuing the massive drain this war has had, not only on our military personnel and families, but also on our economy (12 billion dollars a month) and on our national spirit.

In a chilling report that's been all over the news this past week, I was stunned by the rising suicide rate among our military in Iraq, a rate that rises higher, still, upon their return home. How utterly sad and disheartening—feeling lost ... unappreciated ... forgotten.

In all of this, often times it seems like we get lost in the shuffle; as if there are forces at play out there that are simply too big and unwieldy. What are we to do? Where do we turn? Does anybody care? Is anybody watching or listening?

Truth be told, the rise in gas prices and food prices affects us. Most of us don't have some *plan B* to fall back on. We're people and families of moderate income; and over time, these price increases take their toll on us.

Do you ever feel forgotten, left out? Like nobody sees you ... or remembers you ... or seems to be listening to your voice.

III.

In **Psalm 13**, the psalmist cries out,

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?*

In **Jeremiah 15**, the prophet sighs deeply ... amidst persecution and being ostracized for his preaching: *O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me.*

(You'll remember that Jeremiah was known as a prophet of gloom and doom. God called him to announce some very harsh and difficult truths to Israel—all in response to Israel's continued sinning and *going her own way*. Nonetheless, hard times. And thus, Jeremiah was often persecuted and ostracized.)

And a few generations later, in exile in Babylon, **Second Isaiah** cries out for Israel:

The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.

(Certainly, exile in Babylon—from 587 to 538 BCE—was a time of wrenching despair for the people of Israel. Indeed, she had lost everything—ostensibly as punishment for her sinful ways. And it fell on Second Isaiah to be a voice of promise and hope for the birth of a new day.)

In the story of **Noah** and the flood, for a time, Noah—too—must have felt that way. But later, God remembers the flood. In fact, the flood, as it turns out, was a heart wrenching experience for God ... more than God could bear ... all the suffering and loss. It was too much.

And God, in that moment, determined **never again ... never again would there be a flood to destroy the earth**. For God has remembered ... and God, now, forms a *new covenant* with Noah symbolized by the rainbow in the sky. The rainbow would be a reminder.

Not forgotten.

IV.

In the popular film of some years back, *Cider House Rules*, there's a gripping scene at the orphanage, the setting for the first part of the movie. The children are playing out front in the snow ... and suddenly a young couple arrives, a *potential family* for one of the orphan children. Immediately, the children all start grooming themselves to look presentable.

1. All of the children, of course, long for family—a family to call their own ... to have a mom and a dad ... it's an emotional time ...
2. In this scene, there's this adorable little boy, **Curly** ... he must have been 6 or 7.

3. He'd never been chosen. This time, however, he was ready ... he even had his bag all packed; he was ready. He was just sure that this was going to be his day.
4. But it was not to be. The couple, it turned out, wanted a little girl ... and **Curly** is pictured peering out the window in wistful yearning at the couple as they drive away with their little girl.
5. *How come no one ever chooses me*, he asks? *I'm the best one. I just know I am. How come no one ever wants me?*

Wow! That scene just takes the breath right out of you. Feelings of being *forgotten* ... or left out. Having a sense, sometimes, that no one sees us ... that we don't count ... that we're, somehow, not valued, not cared for, not loved.

We feel about little **Curly** the way God feels about us, friends ... about all of God's creation. We can't bear to leave **Curly** behind ... *to not take him with us* ... because the seed for love is in us so very deeply ... and we can't forget. And of course, neither can God.

Mary, the mother of JESUS, relates the joy of being remembered—not forgotten—in the poetic words of her *song of praise* from Luke 2 (otherwise known as the *Magnificat*):

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*

*Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
(and she might have added): for God has remembered me.*

None of us wants to feel forgotten ... unappreciated ... taken for granted. Even the most confident and successful among us have needs. No matter what our life circumstances, we're all human. And it's human to want to be appreciated and valued and loved.

V.

Even the **Apostle Paul**, in our reading this morning from Philippians 4, alludes to this very thing ... CHECK IT OUT:

For whatever circumstances, for a time, the Philippians had not been able to demonstrate to Paul their deep appreciation of him. He had a history with the church, for sure ... and his efforts had been integral to the formation and gradual building up of the church.

Still, Paul says ...

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.

Now, Paul was never known to be timid or lacking in self-confidence. But the point is that even he, the fiery and brash Apostle Paul ... THE most prominent and esteemed voice in the formation of the early church—even he has moments where being appreciated and valued sure feels good.

Not forgotten.

Friends, always, it's good to be remembered ... to feel like we're not some invisible person out there—unseen, unheard, of little significance to anyone.

VI.

To be sure, one of the benefits of *Election 2008*, are the fresh glimpses we receive, from all the candidates, of life in America ... glimpses of the lives of down-to-earth folks ... folks who often feel left out and forgotten ...

For countless millions of Americans, it's a tough life out there ...

- getting up every day, going to work ... working long hours and sometimes at two or three jobs ... trying to make ends meet ...
- trying to sort through one family crisis after another ...
- trying to cope with the loss of jobs ... with health issues ... with the daily stress of keeping our families afloat ...
- And then, for some of us—later—in our twilight years, wondering and worrying about our well-being.

Sometimes—easily—we feel forgotten.

VII.

In a poignant poem by **Rudyard Kipling** entitled, *The Way Through the Woods*, the poem describes a path, a WAY, once so familiar and known, but now covered by freshly blooming flowers, newly planted trees and a verdant/ flushing garden.

To those familiar with it, the WAY had been lost, or so it seemed. It had been planted over, forgotten, known no more. But not so, says the poem; for the KEEPER knows ... and remembers ... and does NOT forget.

Friends—GET THIS: God knows your name. You're NOT forgotten. God knows ... and God understands ... and God's compassion and love pour over us, again and again.

For any of us, it's easy to get down and to become discouraged. All the time, stuff is happening. But always—too—God comes to us in Christ full of hope and promise ... with the undimming affirmation that *today is a new day*.

Today we gather at the Lord's Table, sharing together the bread and the cup. In the bread we are reminded of the brokenness of Christ's body; and we remember his suffering and sacrifice. Through the sharing of the bread, God draws us in—into God's realm and into a closer union with one another.

In the sharing of the cup, the grace of God's forgiveness pours over us. And we remember—again—that today is a new day, a fresh start, a new beginning.

Friends, to the ends of the earth, for always and ever, God has loved us in Christ. We are NOT forgotten.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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