“Remembering”

A Sermon for the Easter Vigil, 2018

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*When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will* ***remember*** *my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood.*

And now, Act 4 of our Holy Week Preaching Exploration of Spiritual Freedom: Remembering.

I love the Easter Vigil—not only is its liturgy moving and beautiful—the new fire and the searching tone of the Exultet chant leading us into the somberness of this sanctuary, which in just a few moments will flood with light and joyful song—but the stories we hear invite us into a matriochka of memory—a nesting doll of remembrance within remembrance within remembrance.

There is the biggest doll, where *we* remember—where *we* recount—the saving deeds of God. We open that doll to find that among the saving deeds of God is that *God* remembers, not only that God calls to mind, but that God puts back together—RE-members. The bow in the clouds will forever compel God to re-build the covenant between him and his people.

We open *that* doll to find that not only does *God* RE-member, but that God empowers *us* to RE-member. Stretch out your hand that the waters will part, God says to Moses, and to Ezekiel: Prophesy, that these bones come back to life. It is Moses and Ezekiel, allowing themselves to be vehicles of God’s liberating energy, who RE-member those who have come apart.

We open *that* doll to find that in that empowerment of RE-membering with God, we, ourselves, are RE-membered—put back together with a new knowledge of God’s liberating love for *us*. “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act.”

I don’t how most of *you* typically think of memory, or remembering, but this dynamic, collaborative, empowering understanding of it, is not how *I* usually think of it. Remembering, for me, is most often something I was supposed to do, but didn’t. It is relegated to the chaos of busyness, or is something to be doubted and looked at critically.

We have all heard how fluid memory is. As Joshua Foer wrote in his best-selling book on the Art and Science of Remembering: “Somehow, as memories age, their complexion changes. Each time we think about a memory… we transform the memory, and reshape it.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

To law enforcement agents, this quality of memory is a failing, but as we learn this night, for God, this quality is the very means by which the story of Her love for the World is brought into every new age and context.

Remembering---the matriochka of the Easter Vigil teaches us--is not just a passive calling to mind of some absolute set of facts. Remembering is a transformative act of liberation by God.

As many in this community know, my parents got divorced when I was in my teens. Until my early 30’s, what I remembered of that time was that it was difficult, and that I was empty, passively observing from the outside of high school ife. I remembered that I was sullen with my family, and withdrawn. Because this is how I remembered things, I allowed myself to become estranged from my hometown community, and the ways in which I spent my time during those years.

And then, about 10 years ago, Facebook was born. I was reconnected with high school friends, my track coach from that time, cousins that I had seen only every few years at hurried family reunions. And my memory of high school, my life during those first messy years of my parents divorce, was reconstructed. People I had completely forgotten about messaged me and regaled me with warm and wonderful stories of shared moments. Others posted photos of me, in which I am clearly experiencing joy and the liberation of hearty laughter, and also, clearly part of a community of friends—I was decidedly *not* on the fringes of my high school life. I began discussing all of this with my family, and my siblings shared memories of family gatherings in which all of us had participated in the ridiculous and life-giving antics typical of our family. I was given copies of old hometown newspaper articles with photos of me determinedly taking on opponents on the soccer field or where I confidently discussed my 5K race strategy. A friend posted a photo of the two of us performing a piano-violin duet—I remembered how poor my recital fashion was, but how much of me had come alive when I played.

The remembering that these people did on my behalf has given me a very different sense of my life during that period. I am certain that my own memories of suffering are real, and yet they were clearly only part of my experiences during that time. During that time, as others have RE-membered for me, I definitely experienced pure and unbridled joy, vibrancy, mutual relationship, liberating laughter, self-confidence, and commanding voice.

These images and stories have now become part of my own memory of that time. In remembering together with my family and friends, *I* have been RE-membered—built anew in my own mind, in vastly richer color and depth. The darkness I associated with that time, as well as the sense of disconnection between who I was and who I experience myself to be now are gone—My past self and my present self have been re-membered into a single self with a continuity that is grounding and empowering. I am no longer balancing on the fragile platform of a self that is missing large chunks of its identity, but planted on the firm, wide foundation of the fuller self made in God’s image. What new life this has liberated me into!

This night celebrates just this kind of memory—memory that retells the liberating love of God in our past, and in so doing, animates for us a new, life-giving present.

We are about to remember the rock, rolled back from the tomb, and the proclamation by the angel that Jesus has risen. We are about to remember the fear, and yet also the amazement, of Mary, and Mary, and Salome. We are about to RE-member resurrection!

So, I wonder, how will this remembering, come to new life in *our* context, in each of *you*?

What in your life or in the world around you needs to be RE-membered?

This is our night of RE-membering…So, let’s get on with it! May we re-member God’s saving deeds, may we re-member God’s empowering love, may we re-member God’s own risen son, and may *we* thus be RE-membered as the liberating, loving Body of Christ for each other and the world in this very time. AMEN.

1. Joshua Foer, *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, Penguin Books, 2011. Quote taken from <https://reformjudaism.org/yizkor-remembering-through-forgetting>, accessed on 3/26/18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)