

Memorials

September 11, 2022

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OT Lesson: Joshua 4:1-8, 20-24

Epistle Lesson: I Corinthians 11:20-29

Today is the birthday of my daughter-in-law Nicole. If you search for “What happened on this day in 1986”, you will not find a reference to her birth. She’s young though and successful in her work. Maybe someday she will have that notoriety. Birthdays are a sort of memorial because we remember those special to us. Happy Birthday Nicole! We love you!

When you search for events of September 11, you will find that in 1985 Pete Rose, also known as Charlie Hustle, broke Ty Cobb’s record for career hits. Our family is a Reds family and we watched that game in anticipation of the record and we were not disappointed! While the game stopped for 7 minutes for fireworks and a standing ovation, majority team owner Marge Schott presented Pete with a red Corvette that was driven right onto the field. One young kid in attendance said he got his ticket for 50 cents. Imagine.... 50 cents for a lifetime memory! A red marker emblazoned with 4192 was put into left center field in Riverfront Stadium where the hit struck the outfield turf. The newer Great American Ball Park was built over part of the Riverfront outfield but they created a rose garden on the same spot as a lasting memorial to the record breaking hit. Go down the stairs from the west plaza or out the back door of the Reds Hall of Fame Museum and you can visit the rose garden and pay your respects.

On this date in 2002, Johnny Unitas died; he was considered one of the NFL’s greatest quarterbacks and was known as the “Golden Arm”. From 1956 to 1970 he had a streak of 47 straight games with a touchdown pass and a total of 280 touchdown passes for the Baltimore Colts; compare that to only 153 for Bart Starr, famed quarterback of the Green Bay Packers. I had to mention this because of the Bengals game today. He was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers and cut before the season opened in 1955. Big Mistake! There is a memorial to Johnny Unitas in Canton, Ohio at the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Of more significance today, construction of the Pentagon building began on this date in 1941. And then 60 years later, on this day in 2001, it came under attack. On September

11 we remember the attack on the Pentagon; we remember Flight 93 whose courageous passengers stopped an attack on the Capitol; we remember the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center when they were struck by two of the hijacked planes.

Do you remember what you were doing on that fateful day in 2001? Most people over 30 do remember what they were doing. I was at work at an office building on Riverside Drive. During my morning coffee I went into the building break room to get some snack crackers and saw a couple of men transfixed by the television in the adjoining office. They motioned me to join them and in a matter of moments I was transfixed, as they were, watching the surreal events unfold that day. There was little productive work we did that day, mostly we were filled with horror and heartache for those caught up in the senseless attack on our country.

Today there are memorials all over the country to the men, women and children who perished that day, as well as to the first responders who later died from the toxins and ash breathed in on that day. “Over the years, municipalities in the Dayton region have created moving monuments to pay tribute and provide a public remembrance for the devastating attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.” “Beavercreek, Urbana, Fairborn and Lebanon use pieces of contorted steel that were once part of the World Trade Center towers to commemorate the event. More than 1,200 pieces of steel have been delivered to cities throughout the country.” (DDN).

It became a nationwide crusade to engage the public conscience and sense of participation in supporting the victims, their families, firefighters, policemen, medical personnel and others who made sacrifices while performing their duty. The memorial in Fairborn is located on the campus of what is now known as Calamityville, The National Center for Medical Emergency. It has become a training, testing and research center where military and civilian emergency first responders hone their skills. The granite stone standing next to a piece of steel from one of the World Trade Center Towers bears the inscription, “We shall never forget. We shall keep this day. We shall keep the events and the tears in our minds, our memories, and our hearts and take them with us as we carry on.”

Some of the 9/11 memorials around the state and country, like the one in Tiffin, simply say, “Never Forget.” For some people, the unspoken completion of the phrase is, “Never Forgive.” We will never forgive what someone did to us, how they hurt us, how they wronged us. But with God’s help there is a way to remember and yet still forgive. This spirit is expressed by one mother who lost a child at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 who said, “I chose forgiveness because I did not want to become another victim.”

A memorial is meant for us to remember something significant. Unfortunately many of the memorials in our country are to a wartime event. Some include tributes to the lives that were lost or to the contributions that preserve our continued freedom, while others seem to be designed more toward prolonging our anger. The blame for 9/11 has expanded beyond the extremist terrorist cell that initiated the attack and has cast a wide net of suspicion and hatred over all Muslims.

The Good News is that out of the ashes and rubble God has been growing something new. The development of the Baptist Muslim Dialogue Initiative began in 2008. As described by ABC-USA, “[This is] An initiative led by the Community on Christian Unity and Interfaith Relations of the American Baptist Churches USA Board of General Ministries with a goal of creating an atmosphere where these two faith communities can live in peace and respect with one another and promote the common good in the society in which we live and in the broader [world community].” The Initiative was created in response to an Open Letter and Call from Muslim religious leaders to Christian religious leaders in 2007. The letter sought to state our grounds of commonality to “build bridges and understanding in the spirit that loving one’s neighbor is part of loving God.” Pastor Kent and Pastor Jason attended the 3rd convocation of this Dialogue held at Green Lake Camp in 2018.

A couple of years ago a Muslim family moved into our neighborhood and I would often catch view of them from our window. The family included four children, two teenagers and two younger children. During a visit from my granddaughter Kaley we were fishing at the neighborhood pond when one the younger children came walking by. He was quite

interested in the bluegills we were catching so I offered him the use of my pole and helped him to catch a few bluegills, much to his delight and he shrieked with glee each time he put one of the small wriggling fish on the bank. A while later, his father came by the pond, shook my hand and thanked me. Communication was difficult but I knew he appreciated this small gesture of neighborliness.

This summer the teenage children would care for the two younger ones during the day while their parents were working and would bring them to the neighborhood pool in the afternoons. It was there that other neighbors began to get to know the family. One neighbor had her high school daughter practice lacrosse with the teenage girl so she could get a tryout for the school team. The neighbor's husband discovered the high school boy had played soccer in Morocco so he helped him to navigate the paperwork so that he could participate in soccer training camp at the high school. Being a neighbor to those who are shunned is one way of building a memorial to God. These aren't physical memorials but they are still lasting memorials that will carry on for generations.

In our texts for today we read the story of Joshua as he led the tribes of Israel over the River Jordan and into the Promised Land after forty years of wandering. It is one of many stories in the Bible about building a memorial to God. Memorials were often large stones put up as a marker, or many stones piled together to stand out in a place. Stones were easy to come by in the Holy Land; milk and honey were part of the dream and a promise, but rocks were always readily available.

On the journey from Egypt to the Land of Promise, in the wilderness, there were memorials placed by Moses and the people Israel to honor manna's appearance to feed the people, or to mark a revelation of God's word to the people. Joshua had the 12 tribes mound stones from the streambed of the Jordan River to mark where they crossed on dry ground for a second time on their journey to a new homestead.

Passover, itself, grew in the life of the people as a memorial in time, the date and circumstances of the event they did not want to forget, when the Angel of Death struck Egypt but spared the Hebrews. The Jerusalem Temple was meant to mark where

Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac, an association Muslims still connect with the Dome of the Rock on the same spot. It has been a memorial to the faith for over 15 centuries.

If you look around you can quickly recognize that there are many memorials incorporated into the structure and decoration of our sanctuary. The stained glass windows depict the apostles and Jesus. The empty cross above the baptistry is always a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even the banners (made by Janet Lasley) hanging overhead are memorials. The one just above me is a remembrance of Jacobs's ladder and the connection between heaven and earth initiated by God. The banner to my left is a remembrance of the first encounter between Nathanael and Jesus. When Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!" Jesus replied, "You will see greater things than this. I tell you the truth; you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth." (John 1:47-51, NLT).

Joshua directed a member from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to place a stone on the memorial to their crossing. They were not just a heap of stones standing out in a wilderness place, asking the passer-by to wonder "what happened here?" That would be like saying "these are just windows" as they throw multi-colored rays over us. The stones were a declaration that it was only because of God that they were entering the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in their exodus from Egypt and slavery. God had done something worth remembering for all generations. We need our memorials to what God has done to ground us in our faith when the world wants to say to us "There is no God".

The most enduring memorial to what God has done is a memorial made of the loaf and the cup, the memorial given by the hand of Jesus himself, the meal of which he said "This do in remembrance of me." What perseveres for our lifetime is the meaning of sharing in the memorial of the meal that Jesus shared in an upper room on the edge of Jerusalem. "This is my body; broken for you . . . this is my blood, shed for you." It vanishes through being consumed, but it endures in not just our memory but in our

behavior, as the actions of eating and drinking together help us to see how we are now “one body” ourselves. We become living memorials to the sacrifice of Christ.

A few weeks ago I visited the 911 Memorial in Fairborn. The memorial walkways were littered with leaves and downed tree limbs. One dedication brick half covered with debris was engraved with the words “We have not forgotten”. But time and distance from an event makes it easier to forget. The rosebush flower bed in front of the memorial was overgrown with weeds. The miniature American flags lining the beds were mud stained and fallen over. Many of our memorials have suffered similar fate.

There are many forgotten cemeteries, memorials to the lives of our ancestors that are buried beneath layers of growth and decay. Even in the unforgotten cemeteries there are stones uncared for. In August, Pastor Kent and others participated in an event to repair and restore a couple of headstones in the FBC plot at Woodlawn Cemetery. We need to renew our memories often to keep them fresh and alive.

Joshua gives instruction on how to make the memories stay alive, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’”

That is also what communion does for us. It is our memorial to what Christ has done for us. It is part of our story of how we came to be a people of faith. When we celebrate it we restore and renew ourselves to perpetuate the story of what God has done. When you tell your children the story of Jesus you carry the memory forward to another generation. When they tell their children it carries on your faith legacy, as well as the legacy of those who crossed the River Jordan. May we never forget what God has done for us! Amen

References:

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