

“Has It Been That Long?”

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Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body.* 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men* said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.* 6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

PRAYER—O God of All Time, we come to you this afternoon with many perplexing questions. At times, O God, we do not understand this world and we do not comprehend your divine mystery. We seek you this day. As we open our hearts and minds to you, we ask through your Holy Spirit that you would enlighten all that is dark and enliven all that is dead. May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight O God, our Rock and Redeemer. AMEN.

It is a green boot.
I have seen it thousands of times,
if not a million times in my life.
It is nothing special.
You could not sell it and expect to make much money.
Certainly for me it has significant meaning,
but if you saw it,
you would probably quickly forget about it.

Before this green boot passed into my possession,
it belonged to my mother's father's father,
or my great-grandfather.

My great-grandfather John Holland was a farmer who lived his whole life in
Hardin County, Ohio and worked the land on Wildcat Pike Road (also known as
Co. Rd. 144) near Hepburn.

I was five years old when my great-grandfather died.
For whatever reason,
I wanted that green boot.

The green boot was not something that I never saw my great-grandfather wear.
It probably had not been worn in over eighty years.

I was never going to wear the boot either because the boot was full of cement.

I found out a couple of years ago

that the green boot was a class project of my great-aunt Dorothy.

An old work boot with a worn-out heel was painted green and patched with an
array of color pieces of cloth.

That old boot,

painted green,

decorated with patches,

and filled with cement

served as the doorstep at my great-grandfather's farm house.

As a small child,

I can remember being fascinated by that green boot.

And every time I see or remember that green boot,

I remember so many happy memories of the family gathered at the farm,

playing in the fields and in the barn,

how my great-grandfather would make beef and noodles for thirty people.

I was very young when all of this happened,

yet this doorstep that is a green boot evokes so many joyful memories

and has reinforced them time and time again.

On a day like today, a day of reflecting and remembering,

I was curious to understand how memory works.

The short answer is that the nerve network patterns store memories.

We recall a memory only when we activate that network of interconnected
neurons.

But how does this memory thing work?

Information flows from the outside world through our sight,

hearing,

smelling,

tasting
and touch sensors.

Memory is simply ways we store and recall things we've sensed.

Recalling memories re-fires many of the same neural paths we originally used to sense the experience and,

therefore, almost re-creates the event.

Memories of concepts and ideas are related to sensed experiences because we extract the essence from sensed experiences to form generalized concepts.

Long-term memory involves three processes: encoding, storage and retrieval.

- First we break new concepts into their composite parts to establish meaning. Furthermore, we include the context around us as we learn a new concept, or experience another episode in our life. For example, I might encode the phrase "delicious apple" with key descriptive ideas — red color, sweet taste, round shape, the crisp sound of a bite — and then such contextual items as "I'm feeling good because it's a happy fall day and I'm picking apples."

- Second, as we store the memory, we attach it to other related memories, like "similar to Granny Smith apples but sweeter," and thus, consolidate the new concept with older memories.

- Third, we retrieve the concept, by following some of the pointers that trace the various meaning codes and decoding the stored information to regain meaning. If I can't remember just what "delicious apple" means, I might activate any of the pointer-hints, such as "red" or "picking apples." Pointers connect with other pointers so one hint may allow me to recover the whole meaning.

How do our brains consolidate a new short-term memory like "delicious apple" and place it into long-term memory?

We use the hippocampus consolidate new memories. An event creates temporary links among cortex neurons. For example, "red" gets stored in the visual area of the cortex, and the sound of a bitten apple gets stored in the auditory area. When I remember the new fact, "delicious apple," the new memory data converges on the hippocampus, which sends them along a path several times to strengthen the links.

The information follows a path, starting at the hippocampus, circulating through more of the limbic system (to pick up any emotional associations like "happy fall day," and spatial associations like "apple orchard"), then on to various parts of the cortex, and back to the hippocampus. Making the information flow around the circuit many times strengthens the links enough that they "stabilize," and no longer need the hippocampus to bring the data together. The strengthened memory paths, enhanced with environment connections, become a part of long-term memory.

At this point of the sermon,
you should be asking or being to ask:
what does this have to do with anything.
Certainly what I have just said provides an interesting anecdote
and intriguing human physiology lesson.
The point is that memories form an important part of who we are,
provide strong impulses to us on how deal with and process the world around
us,
shape our lives,
and define our Christian journeys with God.

We have memories of those joyful and positive things in our lives.
For some of us,
those happy memories mark our experiences with family,
promotions,
new and old loves,
children.
For others,
those blissful memories follow from new adventures,
finding companions in the midst of change and struggle,
or achieving a seemingly unattainable accomplishment.

And yet our lives are not always filled with delightful memories.
Pain,
hurt,
anxiety,
frustration,
sadness,
anger
are equal,
if not greater at times,
companions on life's journey.
As I said earlier,
all our senses—sight,
touch,
sound,
feel,
and taste—
converge with emotion in our brains to create memories.
We know from our life experiences
that our senses can forcibly retrieve a memory when we least expect it.

Pastoral confession time—
I love to touch things.
When I was a child,
I used to touch everything in the store,
the library,
someone's house.
My mother would threaten me not to touch.
She would say "if you touch one more thing,
you will have to put your hands on top of your head."
Well the impulse to touch led to walking around many stores with my hands on
top of my head.
I have learned to control this touching impulse.
Today,
while I hate shopping,
I still touch too much.
Sometimes shopping for me can be pleasant
because of all the beautiful memories that come flooding back with every touch.
It also can be painful
because a touch,
a smell,
a sound,
a sight
can pull me out of my reclusiveness and touch deep,
hidden,
I-want-to-forget kind of pain.
That pain of rejection,
ridicule as a child,
failures and regret,
a broken relationship that has never healed,
loss never reconciled,
embrace never realized.

We are wounded people who live our lives flooded with memories.
Those memories continue to wound even though they may be years or decades
old.

We remember this day the terrorist attacks that took place in the United States
ten years ago.
It was about this time in the day in Moscow that we would have received word
of that American Airlines Flight 11 had struck the North Tower.
Less than twenty minutes later,
United Flight 175 would strike the South Tower.
30 minutes after,

the Pentagon,
the headquarters of the U.S. Defense Department and all the military branches,
would be hit.

At 10:03 Eastern Time,
United Flight 83 would crash in the fields of Somerset County, PA, after
passengers fought to gain control of the cockpit.

That day ten years ago,
2752 people died because of evil,
hatred,
misguided attempts to change the world.

For some us,
this pain still runs deep.
Maybe we had a family member,
friend,
or colleague killed that day.
Maybe our lives changed as we began to live in fear and anxiety.
Maybe we have had loved ones die in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq.

For others of us,
Sept. 11, 2011 does carry as much hurt,
but we are no less wounded by this world.

Abuse,
death,
war,
famine,
hatred,
evil
have affected our lives,
And as we reflect on the pain and suffering of one event,
we cannot help but be reminded of our pain and suffering.

But somehow,
God was at work in the midst of these tragic,
evil events.

While we certainly remember the tremendous harm done to us,
God is always able to make statement of resistance of evil,
disapproval of hatred,
hope in the midst of despair.

On the day of the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001,
we received stories of people like Wells Crawler.
Wells had graduated from Boston College just a year prior
and was working as an equities trader on the 104th floor of the South Tower.
For several years,

Wells had worked as a volunteer firefighter.
Remember the North Tower was hit first,
and so there were mixed messages sent to people in the South Tower because
there was not clarity of the nature of the events.
Some thought that the incident was caused by plane failure and was an accident,
and so told people to stay in their places fearing they may be struck by falling
debris if they evacuated.
When it became clear that people should leave,
Wells made his way down the stairs.
As the plane then struck the South Tower,
Wells who come to the 83rd floor I believe,
one of the floors that was directly hit,
opens the door from the stairwell and yells
“is anybody in here”
Through all the roaring of the fire and bellowing of smoke,
he hears three voices respond.
So he went to the one voice,
picks her up and carries her down 15 floors until she is met by emergency
personnel.
He then goes back up to get the others.
When all was said and done,
Wells was credited with saving 18 people’s lives that day.
He was last seen running back into the building with emergency personnel to
rescue more people.
In the midst of pain,
suffering,
evil,
and hate,
Wells said I will not let you overcome me and this world.
Wells was one of many God’s acts of resistance to Satan’s evil deeds that day.
We are reminded in John 15:12-13 that Jesus said “My command is this: Love
each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay
down one’s life for one’s friends.”
Among all the painful memories of that day,
we remember the good deeds,
the acts of mercy and compassion,
of hope and healing,
of resistance
that took place.
It was a dark day
but our memories of evil,
hate,
and pain will not prevail.

It is those memories of good that overcome the darkness with light.

I am reminded of a story of another terrorist act.

This one took place nearly 2000 years ago in a place called Jerusalem.

On a Friday,

the Roman guards took a man named Jesus,

a man who had committed no crimes,

but came into this world to bring about the reign of God's love,

forgiveness,

and reconciliation.

He was tortured,

publicly humiliated,

and hung on a cross to die.

He gave his life so that others may live.

It was a dark day for Jesus' friends and family.

Surely painful memories would follow.

Our memories do not lay there.

Our minds go to Luke 24 where the women find the empty tomb.

In this story,

death did not have the final say.

Pain did not prevail.

Hurt did not win out.

Evil did not triumph.

Hate did not succeed.

Instead Jesus is resurrected and destroys death.

God creates for the entire world a memory in which we can draw strength.

When our senses take us to painful places,

we are also reminded of this act.

Christ offers healing in the midst of hurt,

love in the midst of hate,

comfort in the midst of sorrow,

life in the midst of death to all who seek him.

God creates such a powerful memory that our brains cannot forget it.

Christ does not guarantee us freedom from pain,

hurt,

or evil,

but Jesus does provide us a memory,

an act in which we can remember and draw strength.

This act destroys and conquers all hate,

all evil,

and all sorrow.

We remember that a mighty fortress is our God,
a strong protection never failing.
God is our helper among all life's flood of mortal ills.
We shall not fear for God has willed God's truth to triumph through us.

Your assignment this week is easy,
make memories.

1. This week I want you to make a positive memory.
2. Be Christ to someone else. Give them the memory of resurrection.

Make these memories so strong that they circle the networks of your brain to
create a powerful,
lasting memory.

May it be so. AMEN.