

Pastor T.C. Arnold
13th Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 3:15-22
September 10th, 2017

Never forget where you came from. Wise words and perhaps words we have heard from wise people. These words are meant for us to keep in mind our roots – our beginnings – our heritage. In other words, we are told not to leave behind the memory of where we started. Maybe the memory of where we started will help us one day find strength and endurance to overcome. Maybe it will help us to remember those we love.

Never forget where you came from – is what Paul says to the Galatians. In our text for today he even uses an illustration that calls to mind the Father of a great nation – Abraham. “Don’t forget Abraham,” Paul would say. “Don’t forget your roots, your beginnings, or your heritage. Don’t forget who you are!” In this instance, remembering where the people of God came from will show them the truth.

The people that Paul wrote this letter to in Galatia put their trust in something that came “later” in the life of the people. It was important, but it was not the promise that would save them. It was important – and an important event would surround it. The people of Galatia put much hope and trust in the giving of God’s law. They lived in the reflection of the 10 commandments. They placed this mighty event of Moses on Mt. Sinai over and above the promise given to Abraham. What went wrong? How did this happen?

The people forgot where they came from. They placed their trust in an event that happened, according to the text “430 years afterward” (the event of the giving of the law).

You see, this whole confusion rested upon the question: “where do we get our inheritance?” In other words, “What makes us God’s people who are pleasing in His sight so that we might one day receive heaven?” To the people in Galatia we get our inheritance from keeping the law. But Paul would tell a different story.

Never forget where you come from. Paul said to these people, “*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘and to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘and to your offspring,’ who is Christ...for if the promise inheritance comes by the law (many offsprings), it no longer comes by the promise (the one offspring); but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*” The promise comes through Abraham (Israel reduced to one – Jesus the Lord) and not what Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai (the law). This mix-up would lead the people to believe that the ceremonial practices of the Old Testament were still binding and aided the people in salvation.

You see what happened was that Paul went to Galatia to share the Gospel. This time spent with the church there was very successful. Many people were converted and received this life-giving message of Christ. But the church didn’t fully understand. They still insisted that Christians abide by certain Old Testament rites (keeping the ceremonial law). They didn’t want to be caught fraternizing with the Gentiles either. They still thought of themselves better than others. These people were called Judaizers because they believed that one could not separate the gospel from certain legal requirements.

Maybe what helps us today is to understand what Paul was trying to say to the Galatians can be found in Romans chapter four. Paul says to the Romans, “*It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath...therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring not only to those who are of the law but also those who are of the faith of Abraham.*” There are two things that are very important with this whole “law” and “Promise” situation. First is that the law is very important and needful. But it was not given for our salvation. Rather, “*it was added because of transgression until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come*”

(v. 19). And second is about that “Seed.” The Seed is at the heart of the promise given to Abraham. It’s Jesus. Jesus is the one through whom all the promises were fulfilled. He kept the law perfectly because we could not. He was all of Israel placed into one man, and then placed on the cross to die for our forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the promise – Never forget the promise. Never forget where you came from.

Our problem is we do forget where we came from. And then, along the way, we find some other “hope” to hang onto. While these other things may make us feel better, or try to help us feel nothing at all. While these things may get us through the day or help us forget about the bad in life for a while – they are not a hope that lasts forever.

Our world has forgotten where they came from. Oh sure they will say they haven’t forgotten. We are even told we aren’t tolerant enough or have enough respect for where others came from. With that, tolerance has turned into, “do whatever you want” because if it is right for you, then how can it be wrong... even if it hurts you and hurts those around you.

So tolerance is more than just being sensitive to where others came from. It means acceptance of every feeling, every view and every perceived identity. Tolerance will say to those who believe that God actually gave us the truth, that you are not tolerant because you believe in God’s truth instead of my truth. When our identity is put above what God has made us to be, then we have forsaken and forgotten where we truly came from. We came from our Lord – a precious gift of life we have today. And then an even more precious gift of life everlasting through the death of our Lord Jesus. The world has forgotten about this so quickly.

We at times find ourselves forgetting about the promise. We forget where everything we have – everything we have been given – and everything we will be given in life everlasting came from. We have these convenient lapses in memory when we desire what keeps us busy or just keeps us happy to take precedent in our lives.

Beloved in the Lord, this is dangerous and allows a nice little opening for the devil so that he can continue to convince you the next week and the next week that you don’t need to remember where you came from and the promise given by our Heavenly Father. Don’t allow this to happen to you and your family. It’s not unheard of – actually quite common – for God’s people to start thinking – they don’t need this place and these gifts. With this promise given here – they start to believe “well if I just live a good life. If I’m just nice to my neighbors, then God will be happy enough with me.” We start to think we can earn God’s favor. That’s exactly what Paul warned the Judaizers in Galatia about. Don’t forget where you came from.

You came from the promise. You came to life and grace through the promise of a Savior who washes you clean at your baptism. You came through the promise that Abraham’s Seed – Jesus the Lord – would fulfill a promise for you. You came to what you are through the work of our God who loves you so much that your life has been won. And this is the place – right here – where the promise meets your life – for your life everlasting in heaven. This is the place – here – where your life comes through strength in weakness and encouragement in suffering. Right here and no other place is where you are fed with what you need to get you through your week, your month and your year – your eternal life.

Never forget where you came from. Wise words usually said by wise people. From this place – from His precious Words and gifts, He will not let us forget. In our lives He places the cross. That’s where we came from. That’s what will take us home. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.