The process of remembering and forgetting is mysterious to me. My brain spends considerable time remembering and forgetting. The process of remembering and forgetting is mysterious to me. How can I commit a sermon to memory yet can’t remember what I had for dinner last night?

The human brain consists of a billion neurons. Each neuron forms a thousand connections to other neurons that translate into a trillion connections to help us warehouse memory. That’s no less than a billion gigabytes of information that can be stored in our heads. As we age, these connections begin to break down. Some of you know what I am saying! Like I said, my brain spends lots of time remembering and forgetting.

My adult children grew up in the heyday of Sesame Street. I secretly enjoyed this children’s show. I was enamored with the adventures of Bert and Ernie, Big Bird and Cookie Monster. I found the animation clever, the humor quite comical and the characters loveable and appealing.

One of my favorite characters was Forgetful Jones, who dressed as a cowboy and had a girlfriend named Clementine. Forgetful Jones was aptly named, since he was always forgetting things; obvious things such as why he was running the bath water or the name of his horse, Buster.

Just the same, I like Forgetful Jones. I can relate to his forgetfulness. Have you ever had the experience of walking into a room in search of something but can’t remember what you were looking for? Or called someone on the phone and then drawn a blank on who you called? Or left a building but cannot recall where you parked your car? Do you have trouble remembering someone’s name or your security passwords? Tell me these things have happened to you!

We devise little techniques to help us remember things. People used to tie string around their fingers to help them remember. Now we use Post-it® notes or program our cell phones to remind us of something. People in the Old Testament tied Bible verses around their wrists, in little boxes called phylacteries, and mounted passages on the doorposts of their homes, called mezuzah, to help them remember.

Memory is part of what makes us human. Life without memory is a horrible way to
live. Those who have witnessed the onset of dementia or Alzheimer’s can attest to this sad reality. Memory is foundational to who we are as people.

When I used to leave the house at night as a teenager, my mother often said to me, “Peter, remember who you are.” I hated it when she said that to me. Sometimes we’d rather forget who we really are and what we stand for.

*Remember* is an epic Biblical word. Two hundred times in the Bible God’s people are encouraged to remember. Remember is the antidote for forgetting. Many of the Psalms rehearse God’s acts of covenant faithfulness. Israel’s three great festivals are designed to help people remember God’s mighty deeds. Abraham Heschel, considered by many to be the most significant Old Testament scholar of the 20th century, claims, “Much of what the Bible demands can be summed up in a single word—remember.”

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses calls upon the people of God to remember. Fifteen times he instructs them to remember and 14 times he tells them not to forget. In our Scripture lesson, Moses implores us, “Remember the Lord your God” (8:18).

Deuteronomy is not technically a book; it’s a collection of sermons delivered by Moses on the occasion of Israel entering the Promised Land. Moses anticipates the day when his people will settle down in the Promised Land by building houses and becoming prosperous. He anticipates that complacency is right around the corner. Eugene Peterson’s translates Deuteronomy 8:12-14 in *The Message*: “Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied, build pleasant homes and settle in, see your flocks and herds flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living going up and up—make sure you don’t become so full of yourself and your things that you forget God, your God.”

Note the progression in these verses. Prosperity leads to complacency. Complacency leads to pride and pride leads to forgetfulness and, ultimately, autonomy from God. Peterson translates verse 17 this way: “If you start thinking to yourselves, ‘I did all this. All by myself! I’m rich. It’s all mine!’—well, think again. Remember that God, your God, gave you strength to produce all this wealth.”

*Remember* in the Bible entails more than merely bringing something to mind that happened in the past. The Hebrew notion of remembering brings a past event into the present, so that what happened continues to happen now. We remember God’s redemptive action in the past so we can go forward in obedience.

**“Much of what the Bible demands can be summed up in a single word—remember.”**

- Abraham Heschel
So far, we’re the ones doing all the remembering. Yet most often in Scripture, God remembers. God remembers His promises. God remembers His covenant. Time and again God remembers His people.

This is grace, my friends, sheer grace. Even when we forget, God remembers. God’s covenant is not based on any inherent ability on our part to keep it, but on God’s unlimited capacity to remember His love for us.

There are also some things God chooses to forget. We can all be thankful God exercises the discipline of forgetting when it comes to our sins. “I will forgive your iniquity,” the Lord says, “and remember your sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). “I am he who blots out your transgressions for my sake and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 45:23).

Today’s service is designed to help us remember the sacrifice of people, many people unknown to us, who paid an enormous price for our freedom. Their sacrifice epitomizes Jesus’ words, “Greater love has no one than this; that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Memorial Day is a day for remembering. In 1868, flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery as an act of remembering. The idea caught on and soon Memorial Day was expanded to include all Americans who sacrificed their lives in the service of their country. That is why American flags are placed on all 220,000 graves at Arlington Cemetery.

Unfortunately, Memorial Day for many Americans has become little more than a three-day weekend. Memorial Day kicks off the summer vacation season. How odd that this day of remembrance has led to so much forgetting.

Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem called Recessional on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Kipling in his poem not only expresses admiration for the British Empire, but also sounds a cautionary note about how pride and power can undermine an empire. When nations rise to wealth and power, they are inclined to forget God. The immortal words of Kipling’s poem, Lest We Forget, are lifted from Deuteronomy 6:12, “Beware, lest you forget the Lord your God.” As he expresses it in the refrain of his poem, “Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget—lest we forget.”

The Hebrew word for remember is where we derive our English words memorial and monument. Monuments help us remember.

We are partial to monuments in this city. We recently unveiled the Martin Luther
The act of remembering is central to a Christian life of discipleship. We urge you to incorporate daily acts of spiritual remembering into your routine. Daily Scripture reading and prayer help us remember who God is and what He has done for us. When we are going through tough times, we need the spiritual discipline of remembering. We encourage you to utilize this daily list of readings in our devotional as an act of remembering.

There are times of reading the Bible when the words lay flat on the page; seemingly lifeless. Yet, there are other days when these same words leap off the paper to address our lives. On Friday, I read these words from Psalm 116, “Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you” (116:7). Reflecting on how the Lord has been good to me becomes medicinal.

The spiritual act of remembering proves good for the soul. Worship is an act of remembering. That’s why we ask you to make worship a weekly practice. Worship reminds us of an unseen reality that is far more substantial than merely making money. Worship jogs our spiritual memory.

The Lord’s Supper is an act of remembering. “Do this in remembrance of me,” is etched right into our Communion table. We take this past event of Jesus’ sacrifice into the present, so that Christ’s sacrifice becomes the very impetus for our obedience.

Today is a day for remembering. Remember the sacrifice. Remember God’s promises. Remember God’s faithfulness. Remember, lest we forget.