

DAYS TO REMEMBER

Clint Ferrell tells me that in England in the 1600s and 1700s, it was sometimes difficult to keep the real estate records clear. Barons and Lords sometimes changed frequently, and there were no consistent land offices to keep track of the transactions. However, it was very important to keep such matters clear, since a dispute over who owned a major estate could easily lead to a war. So it became the practice to gather all the people of the village together at the time of a major land transaction. It would be announced clearly that such-and-such estate was being purchased by a new owner from the old owner for such-and-such a price. And when these facts were clear, they would beat all the children of the village. That way, for years to come, if anybody had a question about who owned the estate, all those who had been beaten could recall the day and verify the transaction. It had been a memorable day for them – a day to remember.

That seems a bit drastic and cruel to us. However, war is even more drastic and cruel. It got me to thinking about how important it is to remember some things, and what it takes to make us remember.

When the mind gets to toying with something like that, pretty soon it seems like life itself is one vast drama about remembering and forgetting. Our well-being and our very survival depend upon our being able to remember certain important things. If we forget, we must start all over. And sometimes it costs many lives to relearn that which has been forgotten. What will it cost if we forget Jesus Christ?

About two thousand five hundred years ago, Pythagoras knew that the earth traveled around the sun, that the stars were suns, and that the earth was round. He taught that the universe was an immense place. He understood that just as there was a galaxy containing the sun, so there was a still larger grouping of galaxies that dwarfed our Milky Way system. Pythagoras knew and taught this information in the sixth century before Christ. But we forgot! From A.D. 1492 back to 510 B.C. is over two thousand years. That's a long time to be building systems on false premises and founding life on misinformation *simply because we forgot*. On the other hand, if we are not ready for information, we cannot seem to hold on to it.

About eight hundred years before Pythagoras, Moses led the Israelite slaves out of Egypt. It was one of history's biggest miracles. The people swore never to forget it. It was a day to remember. It meant that God did not like slavery. It meant that God *did* care about Israel and had plans for this people. Our world never can seem to remember either one of these things. Anyway, the whole community gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai and received the tablets of the new Law. It was the Covenant between them and the God who had delivered them. It became crystal clear that day, and on many days to come, that the most important item in all of life was to keep that Covenant. The people heard it, the people accepted it, the people swore to keep it – to keep the Covenant – and to teach it to their children and make sure that their children kept it. Yet they kept forgetting. It was imperative to remember, but they kept forgetting. That is the history of Western Civilization for well over three thousand years now: trying to remember – and continually forgetting – our covenants.

Why do we gather here on Sundays? Sunday is the Day of Resurrection. Knowing the Resurrection changes everything. It is a day to remember. It is imperative to remember. Because it is so important to remember, we are sworn to gather and remember it together at least once a week. Yet we keep forgetting. Even when we show up, sometimes we do not remember why. It is hard to remember. And when we cease to remember, everything reverts back to how it was before. Can you ever walk out of here sad, if you remember the Resurrection? Can you ever wonder whether or not to show up here, if you remember the Resurrection?

Paul says to Timothy, "*Remember Jesus Christ.*" A strange comment. How could Paul possibly think that a man like Timothy could ever forget Jesus Christ? But Paul knew that even he himself at times forgot. We all know that we at times forget. Yet it is imperative that we remember.

Some days change the life of a whole people. In like manner, individuals have days to remember. For instance, people remember the day they gave up smoking. Not all remember the date, but they do remember the day and how long ago it was. It may seem like a silly little thing in comparison to crossing the Rubicon or the Delaware, but it is a dramatic change in the life of an individual. So we remember.

The days we remember are days that change our lives. Before the special day, we thought and acted and perceived in one way. After the special day, we think and act and perceive in a different way. Thirty years ago, Doug Pursell was first-string center for the Stanford football team. He was standing outside the library one day, talking to some friends, when he looked up and saw Willene Van Loenen walking by. He had never seen her before and did not even know her name, yet he said, "There goes the love of my life." He was to report later that he was never aware of such a thought forming in his brain, and that when the words came out of his mouth, he was even more surprised than his friends were. He had not been thinking about marriage, long-term relationships, family, or anything close to it. But he looked up and there she was, and those words popped out of his mouth. He was so flabbergasted, she was almost out of sight before he realized that he had to find out who she was. Even I could have told him that she was Mariana's sister, but I was not around at the time. I *was* around to marry them in 1960, and she is still the love of his life.

I realize there are some days that change our lives and we do not notice anything special about them at the time. It does not make any difference if we remember them. The road forks and we sometimes go one way quite casually, without realizing that a whole set of acquaintances and circumstances have been determined by it. Looking back, sometimes we wonder about fate, but these are not days to remember.

I am hoping by now that you are starting to think of the days in your life you most remember. I do not think I ever met a person who could not remember her wedding day. Doubtless there *are* some individuals who do not remember their wedding day, but I do not know them. Most of us remember the days that mark turning points in our lives. Marriage is usually one of them.

Can you remember graduating? Do you remember your first date? Most people remember their operations; their divorces; being fired from a job; getting a promotion or an award. I remember reading Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (Finally I began to understand what's going on here.)

Some days leave a mark on us. Our lives are changed in some way. There is dramatic benefit or dramatic loss, and life is never quite the same again. Sometimes benefit leads to loss or loss leads to benefit, but we remember. These are the "passages" – the pivot points of our lives. If we do not remember, it becomes as if these things never

happened. We then go through experiences but gain nothing; we remain the same as we were. Or sometimes we begin to change and *then* forget, and we return to what we were before. Then we make the same mistakes over and over. We seem to get stuck on some important lesson, and life just keeps cycling around and around, over and over. We go back to smoking. We get remarried. We take a new job that ends up being just like the last job. Sometimes we seem to go for years without any new days to remember, as if we were stuck. Nothing is changing. Nothing is being learned. We just keep going around and around. Some people start getting *déjà vu* and think it means they have had past lives. Sometimes it means they are not doing very much in the present one – just going around and around.

Those of you who know me probably think I am leading up to something. But I am not. I just think it's a good meditation for our time together in God's presence. It is good to think about the days that are the most significant turning points in our lives. We were all born and, while we do not actually remember that, we celebrate it anyway. We remember it once each year. Things keep happening to us or we take vows of one sort or another, and we get "days to remember." We lose something and/or gain something or we go through some trauma, and it becomes a day to remember. Life was one way for us before that day, and after that day it is different in some way. Everyone has some personal dates that, for them, are a move from B.C. to A.D. It's supposed to be that way. We are pilgrims. We are on a journey. We are not supposed to get too comfortable, safe, secure, or locked-in to where we are. God keeps trying to change us. That is part of the plan, part of the design. If nothing is changing in your life, you are keeping God very far away. If your world or your life is flat, you have forgotten Pythagoras on the outside and Jesus Christ on the inside.

So I am hoping that when you get home, you will make a list of your special days – your days to remember. I hope you will write them down and bring them back to clarity and consciousness, lest you forget and have to start going back over all the same old ground.

Most of all, of course, I hope you will spend time thinking about the spiritual and religious turning points in your life. On what day, especially, did you first decide to abandon your life to God? Such days are preceded by much preparation and followed by many further decisions and then re-decisions. Nevertheless, it is a memorable day when we finally decide to stop living for our own goals and desires and start living to love and serve God.

Jesus said, “*You must be born anew,*” and this new birth – this being born of the Spirit, this turning of our life and our will over to God – has always been the most dramatic turning point of any person’s life. In early Christendom, it was celebrated by baptism and sealed by the giving of a new name. Because such practices have been lost, it becomes more important than ever that we each find some way to celebrate and remember the day when we gave our life to God. You would think Christians would celebrate this day even more than they do their regular birthday. If we do not remember, it will all go back to the way it was before.

The way it was before, for all of us, is that we lived for our own sakes. We had our own goals, even if one of them was to win God’s approval. We wanted to be in control. We made our own decisions. We were in charge of our lives. We maybe even tried to impress others with how good or godly or generous or kind we were. But we had not yet turned life over to new management, placing ourselves at God’s disposal. It is not always the happiest day, but it is the biggest turning point in our lives, when we decide to belong to God. When was that day for you? It is a day to remember.

Some people tell me that they have always been so in tune with God that when they turned their lives over in obedience, it made no ripple in their consciousness or in their behavior. The jolt was so mild when they decided to follow God’s guidance in all things, that they have no memory of the changeover. I find that remarkable. Do you think that’s remarkable? I once had a friend in AA who could not remember the day he had stopped drinking. None of the rest of us could tell either, since we kept seeing so much new evidence that he had not.

It is an easy dilemma to solve, however. All of us, today, in the quiet and prayer of the communion service, can turn or re-turn our lives over to God’s care. And we can swear once again to have no earthly goals except to serve and obey God. We can renew our vows to make no new decisions without seeking God’s guidance, and to have no conscious motives except the desire to see God’s Kingdom increase and to want God’s will done on earth.

Saying and praying and meaning that with all of our hearts and without any subterfuge in us whatsoever, some of us might even discover that this day itself has become a day to remember. We remember the conversion days that change our way of living forever after.