

Text: Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7; Titus 2:11-14; John 1:1-14

It's either a mercy or a warning to preachers, but after you spend a few years in the pulpit- you tend to forget the sermon from last Christmas- or the Christmas before...not to mention ten years or more ago. What I do remember is the year- not that long ago- that some flu or the like was beginning to wear on me- and I knew that "longer" was not in anyone's best interest. The Christmas eve sermon was an abbreviated version of what I'd intended- and I gripped the altar a bit more tightly than usual while genuflecting... - and after getting through the sermon, and the rest of the liturgy- and greeting people- when I got upstairs to the rectory- my dear sons greeted their exhausted, queasy father with- "Great sermon dad... only four minutes". Who knew they paid such careful attention?

That, I remember, even if I forget what I said. Some things we remember, some we forget. So let me ask you - what will you remember from this Christmas? What is it you will forget?

There are some things we should forget- old grudges certainly seem less compelling when we kneel before the manger. If he has loved us so deeply, maybe we could be a little more patient with each other. We all carry guilt- things done or left undone- things said, words that could have been spoken. This child is born- and will grow strong- strong enough to carry the burden of our sins and to offer forgiveness. Ask for it- and then believe it- learn what you can from mistakes and the hard work of repentance- and then forget the guilt and shame; trust God's offer of forgiveness and the new beginning God longs to make of our lives.

Most years come to their end with some frustrations and disappointments- we do not always go from strength to strength

and from glory to glory. Again, learn from the experience- but the past should not weigh us down- not when God's own presence in our midst is revealed in an infant- what clearer sign could there be to orient us towards the future? However old we are—Christmas brings us face to face with hope and promise that transcends even as it fulfills all that we could imagine. Forget whatever weight of failure or disappointment hangs over you- and learn from this infant to hope. The child has a lifetime to look towards- by this child's grace, we have an eternity to look towards. The past does not define us when God offers us such a vast tomorrow.

We come to Christmas with memories of losses and sorrows in the year that is ending- some of those sorrows are the signs of how deeply we love someone no longer with us- and those memories are not so much forgotten as transformed in this light shining through this dark night. No, we do not forget those we love but see no longer- we pray for them, as we trust they pray for us- as we are all called to continual growth in service, in holiness, in fellowship with God and each other. When heart-breaking sorrow is tempered and healed by faith, it is not that we have forgotten- but that we remember those we lost within the larger memory of God's promise. We can forget the sharp pain of farewell, and still remember the loved one.

But I don't intend to preach on forgetting- but on what we remember.

The epistle that is read on Christmas Day tells us- "*In many and diverse ways, God spoke of old to our ancestors, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son*". And we just fell to our knees in awe that "*The word was made flesh and dwelt among us- and we have beheld his glory*".

Above all, remember that God- the God who spoke creation into being, the God who is, who was and who will be- God speaks to you. In the very beauty and joy that delights us this night- and when we know that things should be better- that we should be better- God speaks to us in that very longing.

God speaks- and you were created to join that Conversation. Pray- pay attention to God in the world in its beauty and its need- receive the infant born this night- and follow the steps of his life and listen as he speaks. We rejoice that Christ is born- precisely because God is now in our midst, dwelling among us- pay attention to that. Remember that God speaks- and that in the face of Jesus, in his words and actions- you will know God- and you will know yourself. Tonight - the old story of Bethlehem asks us to watch the whole life that begins in the Manger. - The great hymn that opens John's Gospel calls us to stand in the light- by which we can see- and to listen to the Word that is spoken- spoken to re-create- as it was to create in the beginning. Listen- not just tonight- but in the days and weeks ahead. Not just to the silent word lying in the manger- but to the Teacher whose word is challenge and hope. God speaks- in many and diverse ways- and you were created to hear and respond.

And then, the most obvious thing- remember each good thing that your life holds tonight- every person who loves you, every simple pleasure or astounding joy. Remember them and be thankful- it all comes from God's gracious hand and from the people God places in your life. Like sermons, the gifts you give and the ones you receive will tend to be forgotten as time passes but remember- the hands that give- Remember those who love you and be grateful.

And with that- remember also those who look to you- those closest that are so easy to take for granted; those who live or work on the edges of your life- and are easy to overlook- and those whose need or sorrow are so great we would rather look away. Remember the people - to whom God intends you to be a Word of love- of simple respect or attention- or a word of generosity that sustains hope. Remember those who look to you with respect, with love- God speaks to us when others imagine the best that is in us- when other's recognize, before we do- what we are capable of accomplishing. Remember those who look to you and you see in the best in you- and hear God's call through them.

Whatever else we forget of this year's holidays - let it include the grudges that seem so petty, let forgiveness and new beginning sink guilt and shame into forgetfulness- and let hope and strength take root instead. Remember- that out of the depths of eternity- and through the long unfolding story of creation - and in the life and words of Jesus- God is speaking to you- listen- pay attention- and you will hear the silent Word that makes sense of life- that turns you towards the future, grateful and conscious of all that is good- ready to love and be loved- ready to receive and ready to give. Remember every good thing, every true word and every beautiful moment- because God's glory shines around us, carols break the silence and the light of Christ shines through our sorrows and fear. The Word was made flesh and dwelt- dwells among us- full of grace and truth. And that is unforgettable.

Sermon by The Revd David C Cobb
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Christ-Mass, December 24, 2009 10pm