

The Spanish born American author George Santayana once wrote, ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’ Our Psalm for today is a portion of Psalm 105, which is in itself one of a series of Psalms that rehearses a community’s remembering of its past, of God’s dealings with his people from the call of Abraham through to the entry into the Promises Land. It recalls the great events of Israel’s redemptive history along with the times of failure and rebellion. It is a story of the judgement and the mercy of God and lies at the heart of their self understanding of who they were, a people belonging to God.

This set me thinking about remembering and how a community remembers its past, and how that remembering contributes to their own understanding of who they are. Memories of course can be skewed by a number of factors, by prejudice, by past or perceived hurt and by a whole range of social and political factors. I recall early on in the Troubles in Northern Ireland, seeing two newspaper clippings on the SRC Notice Board in Trinity. They were reports in the Newsletter and the Irish News of disturbances in Belfast that had taken place earlier that week – but told from very different perspectives. The Newsletter described a riot that had been instigated by Republicans and the Irish News presented it as a riot instigated by Loyalists. If you think about it the reports in both the Newsletter and the Irish News were each moulding the memories of their respective readerships; each reinforcing their communities’ understanding of themselves as victims and the other as aggressor in the developing conflict.

I also recall being present at a meeting of the Church of Ireland clergy in the Antrim Ballymena area at which the speaker was Dr David Alderdyce, then leader of the Alliance Party. It was the beginning of the peace process, the IRA had declared its ceasefire and he had just held his first meeting with Gerry Adams. He was speaking of the part played by the Churches in the history of

Northern Ireland. He himself had grown up in a Presbyterian Manse in Ballymena. He said at one point, ‘Too often in the past the clergy had acted as chaplains to the tribe, offering comfort to their own, rather than prophets speaking God’s word into the situation of conflict.’ That, he said, would have to change if we were to play our part in promoting reconciliation and healing in Northern Ireland.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the growing revelations of organised hacking of the phones of hundreds of people in the field of politics but also bereaved relatives of victims of crime, of armed conflict by staff of News Corporation. We have also learned of the often incestuous relationship between that same organisation and leading politicians and members of the Metropolitan Police. It brings home the potential of powerful media groups to influence our society, to bring their own particular political agenda to bear on the presentation of the news that we tune into through newspaper, radio, television and internet and through that influence the very democratic process that we cherish.

What I have been thinking about so far is the importance of the memory, be it of an individual or a community, in understanding who we are. We have also seen how a memory that is distorted by prejudice or fear or guilt can distort that self understanding of ourselves or of others. We have also seen how powerful media groups have the potential to mould a community’s self understanding in line with its own political agenda.

Judaism has long understood the importance of memory in their understanding of themselves as a people called by God. The Old Testament Scriptures enshrine a community’s memory of a growing relationship with the God who called them. We see it in their worship – in Psalms such as we used today, in the great Festivals such as Passover, when a community remembers themselves

as a people redeemed from slavery. Then at crucial times in their history, there is a renewal of the Covenant, when the people reaffirm their commitment to God. And so their remembering is more than just a recollection of past events, a matter of historical curiosity, it is a remembering that shapes their whole understanding of who they are as a people before God.

Sunday by Sunday we remember. In the reading of Scripture, in the singing of Psalms, of Canticles, of hymns we recall the events, the people that lie at the heart of our faith. The Scriptures themselves are written within the context of faith, written from faith to faith, that we might believe. Sunday by Sunday we set our own faith journey, our past, our present and our future in the context of the faith journey of the People of God down through the ages.

Then, as we do today, in the Service of Holy Communion we remember.

In Christ you shared our life that we might live in him and he in us  
As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we not only remember the cross and resurrection as events that happened in the distant past to the historical figure of Jesus. As we remember, as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we bring these events into our present, our hopes, our fears, our relationships. We offer up our faith, our lives to be shaped by the Cross and Resurrection, by the self sacrificing, self emptying love of Christ himself. We remember who we are, as individuals and as a community, whose we are and whom we serve. As we prepare to leave we pray:

Almighty God,  
we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out  
in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work  
to your praise and glory.  
**Amen.**

We close by saying together the Prayer of General Thanksgiving which is printed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> page of your lesson sheets

**Prayer of General Thanksgiving**

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
we your unworthy servants  
give you most humble and hearty thanks  
for all your goodness and loving-kindness.  
We bless you for our creation, preservation,  
and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable love  
in the redemption of the world  
by our Lord Jesus Christ,  
for the means of grace and for the hope of glory.  
And give us, we pray,  
such a sense of all your mercies  
that our hearts may be unfeignèdly thankful,  
and that we show forth your praise,  
not only with our lips but in our lives,  
by giving up ourselves to your service,  
and by walking before you,  
in holiness and righteousness, all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,  
be all honour and glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.