

**Romans 1:16-17**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

**Romans 3:21-26**

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

**“Things I’d Like to Forget”****Rev. Charles Schuster****June 1, 2008**

There were a lot of things I didn't get to announce today, including the canoe for the Heifer Project. Rob Bean is here for that. Also various ways of paying down the debt, and that's all in the bulletin.

Mitch Albom in his book *For One More Day* has Charlie Benetto. On his mother's birthday, Charlie decides to leave. On his mother's birthday, and on that day she dies, after he left, and he cannot forget. And then the vision. It's his mother. They talk. "I wasn't there when you died, Mom. I lied. It was the worst lie I ever told. I said it was work. It wasn't work, it was a game, just a stupid game. I want it to stop, Mom, the anger, the guilt, I want it to stop. I want to forget." And Mitch Albom gives Charlie one more day to visit his mother, to learn to forget, to ask forgiveness. And wouldn't we all like to turn back the clock and repair a moment in time? Things we want to forget.

I'm guessing that Brooke Shields would like to forget something that she said in a speech. She had good intent, but she stood in front of a large crowd and she said, "Smoking kills. If you're killed, you've lost a very important part of your life." And I'm guessing that Marian Berry has a lot of things he'd like to forget. Close to the top of his list was when he said of his District of Columbia, "Outside of killings, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country." And if John Kennedy could do it over again, when he stood at the Berlin Wall, he might have been a little more careful when he said in German, "I am a Berliner." But German-speaking people knew in listening to him that he said "I am a jelly doughnut."

We all have things that we'd like to forget, and who among us does not have some part of our past we'd like to forget. I'm not looking for a show of hands. Maybe it was the math quiz in Junior High School, when we found the answer on the desk next to us, and she got

it wrong, and so did we. Maybe it was the little distortion that became a lie, the consequences of which have reached up from then to now. Perhaps it was the vase that stood on the mantle that found our baseball when we threw it, after we had been told to go outside, the vase that had been brought over from the old country. What would you like to forget?

This morning there are two pieces of advice, two messages from Jesus, two words of wisdom from him to us. He is saying to us, "Get over it." And then he is saying to us, "And get on with it." If there are some things we want to forget, here comes Jesus, saying to us, "Get over it." And he says this in the breaking of the bread as he, through the centuries, looks at us and says, "Remember me in the broken bread. Remember me." And what does that imply? And what does that mean, and how will that help us when there are things we are trying to forget? Jesus telling us, "Remember me." Jesus breaking the bread, "Remember me." Things you're trying to forget – get over it. If we remember him, as he asked us to do, we'll remember lots of things. We see him through the eyes of the Christian faith as the son of God. We believe there was God in him, God-likeness in him, and we also see humanity in him. He was as perfect as it gets, to be human, thoroughly good, concerned about people that others wanted to discard or ignore. He came to make religion within the reach of every woman and man. If we remember him, we remember a person who seemed to want people to look beyond him to see the God he worshipped, the God he called Abba, father. He said "Remember me."

We know something about his birth, we know something about the early years up to age twelve. We believe that his parents took him to the temple in Jerusalem, and that they lost him in the crowd. We believe that when they caught up to him, those words that he spoke, an encounter that was not a happy one, saying to them, "What did you think? Did you not know I'd be about God's business?" We think he probably started his public ministry about age thirty, something like that. One of the accounts says that it happened at a wedding in Cana when his mother looked at him and said, "It's time for you to be a man. Thirty years old, living at home? Time for you to take a step, live out your destiny." It happened at the wedding. The wine ran out and he was told by her to go get some, and he turned the water into wine, but not before this difficult encounter with his mama where he said, "What is this to you?" Or "What am I to you?" Or "Get off of my back."

We saw the dark side when he noticed the money changers in the temple and he turned over the tables and picked up a baseball bat, a Louisville Slugger, I believe, and said to them, "You have made this house of God a den of thieves." A time that I think he'd probably like to forget, I don't know. Why did he call attention to himself at the last meal? Why did he put a central part of the spiritual time together with those haunting words, "Remember me." Remember me. All the apostles sinned. All have fallen short of the glory of God. All have sinned and all have fallen short of God's glory. I wonder if even Jesus fell short, in his mind, of the glory of God. I wonder if he's telling us, "Remember me" and is saying to us, "Get over it." Because there's this eighteen-year period of time when all was forgotten, when nothing was remembered, between age 12 and 30, eighteen years, eighteen forgotten years. What happened?

Could it be that there was a time when he thought about power, real power, when he could take over and run things? A kind of Machiavellian side to this Prince of Peace? When in his mind he was tempted, and his mind he fell short of the glory of God? Remember me. And then there was that time when he was tempted by the magic of his personality to make stones seem like bread, and you can't live on bread alone, especially when it's made out of stones. Was there a time when he was tempted by the magic of his personality, when in his mind, he was tempted, and he fell short, in his mind, of the glory of God? Remember me. And there was that time when he was tempted to call an angel down to protect him from harm, tempted to take the easy way, when in his mind he thought about it, and he fell short of the glory of God. Remember me.

There's a book written by John Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, and he labels this book as a psychological-historical portrait. Miller believes the episode which I just read, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew where Jesus wrestles with Satan, that's symbolic of the time when Jesus struggled with his own sense of grandiosity. Miller makes a strong case that, in that struggle, he was tempted and he knows because he learned what it means to fall short of the glory of God because in his mind he did, he almost did. It came together in a dream. You can't turn stones into bread and be nourished. And you can't have coercive power and then preach about the love of God. And you can't throw yourself off a building, it won't fly. Neither will you. Power, magic, safety – did he think about it? Did he fall short of the glory of God? Could it be that's the reason he told his friends, when he broke the bread, "Remember me"? "Remember how in my mind I fell short of the glory of God? Get over it. We all fall short of God's glory."

If we all fall short of the glory of God, we can get over it. We can give ourselves some slack, because we are not destined to be perfect. We are born to be human. Anna Quinlan was right when she said, "The thing that's really hard, and frankly sometimes annoying, is giving up being perfect and beginning to work on becoming ourselves." Yogi Berra said it better. He said, "If the world were perfect, it wouldn't be." Everybody has flaws, makes mistakes. He went onto say, especially umpires. And Jackie Robinson was out. Nobody's perfect.

Sometimes when we try to extend this image of perfection, it is boring. Just boring. How many of us ever pay attention to the instructions given on an airplane by flight attendants before the plane takes off? You've heard them a hundred times. They may say those words flawlessly, perfectly, but nobody much listens. I always count the number of seats to the exit, frankly. But that's not because they tell me to. I found something in a magazine about flight attendants and what they are telling passengers at the beginning and the ends of flights to make it more interesting, because they have a sense, and I'm sure they're right, that nobody's paying attention. They're convinced that people don't listen. One flight attendant said to the passengers, as the plane was preparing to take off, "In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab your mask, put it over your mouth and nose. And if you're traveling with a small child, secure your mask before assisting them with theirs. And if you are traveling with more than one small child, select your favorite."

Another flight attendant said to the passengers, as the plane taxied into the concourse at the end of the flight, “As you exit the plane, make sure to gather all your personal belongings. Anything left behind will be divided equally amongst the flight attendants. And looking over this group, I would advise you please not to leave your husbands.” I remember being on a plane, this actually happened, we got to cruising altitude and the pilot came on and asked the passengers to give a round of applause to someone named Herb, someone named Martin, and Allison, because it was their first flight, and they were in their nineties. And we all applauded. And then the pilot said, “Thank you, all three of us are in the cockpit.”

We are not perfect. There are things we may want to forget. We fall short of the glory of God. Jesus said, “Remember me,” as he broke the bread. Get over it. Second thing: Get on with it. He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them and he said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” He spoke of the new covenant, the new day. “Get on with it. I want to meet you at the table, and I want you to come to the table as often as you can, because it’s new wine, and you’re new wineskins. It’s always here for you. It’s a chance to remember, a chance to reload, a chance to rethink. Get on with it.”

Judy Sheindlin, Judge Judy, in her book *Beauty Fades, Dumb is Forever*, could be the first time that book’s ever been quoted in a sermon, in a United Methodist church, and it could be it will be the last time, she tells us, “Do not abdicate.” Get on with it. She, says, “I may come off on TV as if I have no fear,” and she does. She said, “I got a lot of fears, a lot of fears. My husband is an expert on DNA. He’s written two books on DNA. In fact, he teaches classes to law students on forensic DNA. Well, I’ve written a book on DNA as well, only it’s not that kind of DNA. My book has nothing to do with genetic characteristics, which you can do nothing about. It has everything to do with your life, which you can control. In my book, DNA, the letters stand for “Do not abdicate.” “

The table is a new start. It is a fresh beginning. Do not abdicate, get on with it. I like what Winston Churchill said, he said, “If you’re going through hell, keep going.” And sometimes it’s hard to keep going, when there are things we’d like to forget. Sometimes it’s almost impossible to get on with it, when we are apt to dwell on what we have done or what we have said. I really don’t know how these attorneys recovered, after they said what they said, in the courtroom in the trial. I found a list of questions actually asked of witnesses during trials. It was in the Massachusetts Bar Association lawyers’ journal, young lawyers, I suspect. The first question: “Now, Doctor, isn’t it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn’t know about it until the next morning?” And then one witness was asked, “Were you present when the picture of you was taken?” Another question, seriously, “Now, how far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?” And my all-time favorite: “Doctor, how many autopsies have you performed on dead people?”

How does a lawyer get on with it after they’ve done something like that? Something they’d like to forget. How do we get on with it? Because we must, you know. If we don’t get on with it, we will lose ourselves to it, and because if we don’t, it will forever form our identity, and we should never be known by the mistakes we make. The table is the

place to come, to be reminded to get on with it, because the table is the place where Christianity experienced its biggest scandal, and the place where Christianity makes its strongest argument. “One of them betrayed me, I knew they would. One of them denied that he even knew me, three times. All of them ran when I was arrested. I thought they would. Yet upon that rock, of those people, of my friends, I build the church.”

The last supper, how important. I’m going to the last supper next Thursday. I’m going to the last supper next Thursday. I’ll tell you about it. Some of you may know my sister’s son’s getting married in Italy, and we’re going to the wedding, and it’s in Milan, which is where Da Vinci’s “Last Supper” mural is on the wall, and we have reservations, and I’m going to the Last Supper next Thursday. So important. Jesus called it the new covenant. He called it something new, something important. Paul called it justification by faith. It says to us, if we fall short, then we stand tall and try again. That’s the last supper. That’s what it says to us. It says to us, if we get stuck, we just keep making motion, because we don’t stay stuck. It says to us, if we can get on with it, we don’t have to try to forget it because we will find we left it behind.

Houston Smith has written in his book, *The Soul of Christianity*, a statement about the importance of the Last Supper. He says that it’s all in the word “remembrance.” “Do this,” Jesus said, “in remembrance of me.” He said that thing, that event, that sacrament is laden with symbolism. To re-member is to re-assemble parts that have been surrendered. To re-member, to re-assemble ourselves, we come to the table to remember, to reassemble ourselves, we come to look at the past as prelude, to see the future as the place where God waits for us to get on with it, for the God we worship is not a God who is saying, “What have you done for me lately?” The God we worship is the God who is saying, “What are you going to do for me next?” And that begins at the table. When we finally put aside the things we’d like to forget. So we are invited to come to the table, and we will receive the bread, we will have taken the cup of the new covenant, and it may be a passing thought given to what we would like to forget, if so we want to hear Jesus’ words saying, “Hey, remember me? We all fall short of the glory of God. Get over it. And do this in remembrance of me Re-member at the table. Re-assemble at the table. Get on with it. And when you leave, don’t back down. Because it’s a symbol, but it’s my blood and my body that’s in you. You have a fresh start. Every time you come to the table, you have a fresh start. Now go out there, and make me proud. In remembrance of me.”