

## Meadowbrook Congregational Church

### “Remembering the Future”

Easter – April 4, 2010

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*Luke 24:1-12*

*24* But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. *2* They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, *3* but when they went in, they did not find the body. *4* While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. *5* The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. *6* Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, *7* that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ *8* Then they remembered his words, *9* and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. *10* Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. *11* But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. *12* But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

If you attended worship the past couple of weeks you will know that I’ve had a couple of embarrassing moments. Two weeks ago when it was time for the pastoral prayer, I decided to remain seated comfortably in my chair. Last week when it was the appropriate time for all of us to offer hospitality and greet one another in the love of God, I strolled directly to the pulpit waiting for the choir to sing their introit. I blame my forgetfulness less on my aging brain than on the busy nature of the season as it is reflected in our worship.

I once heard a story about a man who upon looking over his calendar discovered that he had accepted a dinner engagement the previous week and then had forgotten all about it. Of course he felt terribly embarrassed about his mistake. Immediately he called the hostess of the dinner and apologized profusely for his forgetfulness and his apparent bad manners. The hostess accepted his apology but replied in a puzzled tone of voice, “But you *were* here for dinner last week! Don’t you remember?”

In case you didn’t know, tomorrow is the first day of the regular season for our Detroit Tigers. I remember that! I was watching a preview show recently and it showed the players preparing for the season through drills in Lakeland, Florida. I watched as the pitchers practiced running over to first base to take a throw when a ball was hit to the first baseman. Supposedly pitchers do this a thousand times in spring training so their minds and bodies will instinctively react when the situation occurs in a real game. It is a very boring and tiring drill. When I played high school baseball I complained

about it to my coach. "Why do we have to do this drill so many times?" He replied, "So you will remember to do it when you need to do it." Later that season, when I was pitching, a ground ball was hit to my first baseman. I stood on the mound watching the action as the hitter ran to first base. I had forgotten to cover the base and my first baseman had no one to whom to throw the ball. I felt so foolish! Immediately after the play my coach called timeout and walked to the mound to have a conversation with me. "Remember when we did all those drills that you didn't like early in the season? This is why we did them. The runner at first is yours. You had better get the next three guys out." Somehow I did. And I can safely say that in a similar situation, I never, ever forgot to cover first base again. I remembered.

Remember. I have mentioned before the remembering is a key to our tradition of faith. The ancient people of faith were asked to remember the covenant between God and God's people and the saving act of the Exodus event. When we gather around the communion table we hear the words of Jesus saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." We eat of the bread and drink the cup to remember his life and his continued presence with us.

It is interesting to note that of the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection, Luke accents the word "remember." According to Luke, the followers of Jesus were puzzled by the events of the day. The women who came to the tomb found the stone rolled away and the grave empty. They were perplexed. Suddenly two men in dazzling clothes appeared and said, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Remember what he told you a long time ago, when he was still in Galilee." The account goes on to say "Then the women remembered his words, returned from the tomb, and told these things to the eleven disciples and all the rest."

The author of Luke describes an interesting Easter story. There is no appearance of the Risen Christ. The visitors to the tomb find only emptiness and these strange messengers telling them to remember. Notice that it isn't a question, "Do you remember?" It is a statement or a command. Remember. Remember what he said would happen. The Son of Man would be handed over to sinners. He would be crucified. On the third day he would rise again. Remember what he said would come to be.

Sadly, remembering implies forgetting. The women did not come to the tomb that morning with any hope. They had heard Jesus talk about his death and resurrection many times but couldn't remember. Their heads and hearts were full of a painful reality. They came expecting to anoint the dead. After being told of the empty tomb, the disciples were not easily persuaded either. Perhaps the women had gone to the wrong tomb or maybe the body had been stolen. It seemed like an idle tale and the disciples did not believe the women. They had forgotten what Jesus had promised.

Today we seem to forget. The realities of our world are sometimes downright frightening. Our hours are sometimes consumed by fear. In these days there is a constant apprehension over the future of our jobs, our income, our community, our children and our parents. Some are awash in concerns of health. Others are drowned in their grief. We are too immersed in our own thoughtless busyness to remember. The possibility of Easter is forgotten in our sorrow, our worry, our fear, and our activity.

When the women remembered Jesus' words they were transformed. They suddenly realized that they were looking for Jesus in the wrong place. The death of

their friend and leader, their fear and their uncertainty about the future had kept them from understanding what this moment was all about and what the future would bring. Remembering put everything back into order and gave them a reason to rejoice and to tell others the good news.

Brian Stoffregen writes that remembering means “to make thoughts present... words of events that happened in the past become part of one’s life in the present.” Stoffregen adds “remembering is more than just thinking about someone or something. It is ‘re-presenting the historical event’ so that we, in the present, are also participants. Upon remembering, suddenly the empty tomb made sense in relation to the life and the teaching of Jesus. Jesus had said that the Messiah would suffer. He talked of his death and resurrection to come. Suddenly they saw a pattern in his words, a plan coming to completion in what they were seeing and hearing.

Luke’s account teaches us that our Easter faith is not born upon a stone that was rolled away or a sighting of empty burial clothes. Easter faith is created in remembering and recognizing the presence of the Risen Christ in our own human experience. Easter comes when we remember that there is an ever-present reality that stands in stark contrast to what we might be experiencing in our world. Easter gives us hope when we remember the God promises to do for us what God has already done in Jesus the Christ.

A couple of weekends ago my daughter Maren returned visiting us from college. Each time she returns home she seems a little older, perhaps a little wiser. This time she talked about important things like money, relationships, goals, and commitments. These things are suddenly very important to her. Maren said that she now remembers us talking about these kinds of things. What was once parental babble is now evolving into wisdom. Instead of ignoring it, she now listens. It is pertinent. It explains the present. It gives her hope for the future.

Fred Craddock writes, “Faith does not move from promise to fulfillment. It moves from fulfillment to promise. Remembering is activating the power of recognition.” Those visitors to the tomb on Easter morning could remember and make sense of Jesus’ promise only after seeing the tomb was empty. But when they remembered what Jesus said, they suddenly had the power to make some sort of sense about their current reality.

Easter is a time for us to remember. We hear and tell again the story of the resurrection so that we might not forget. Amid all of the dashed optimism of our world we need to remember that God has acted in the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The powers of death and darkness were defeated. God’s plan is being played out even in the midst of our present reality. On Easter we can remember what happened. On Easter we can have hope in what is yet to be.