



God Remembers

TEXT
Psalm 136:23–25

April 19, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Brandon Frick

²³It is [God] who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; ²⁴and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever; ²⁵who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Pop Quiz: Please put away your watch, phone and/or calendar, and answer this: What ... is today's date?

If you knew the answer, you're doing better than me most days.

Without the rhythms of work, school and going to church on Sundays — especially Easter — it's all getting a little blurry. Even the seasons can't make up their mind right now. Plus we're a bit preoccupied right now. We're worried, not sleeping well and starting to get antsy indoors. And we're trying to learn new tricks like using Zoom, sewing masks or teaching algebra. It's hard to keep it all straight, hold it all together and remember everything.

And that makes us feel not only socially, but emotionally and spiritually isolated as well. So I want you to hear — really hear — this good news from our reading: God has not forgotten you. You are not alone in

this. God is with you, and God is for you, especially when you are struggling ... lost ... and grieving the loss of what was.

“God remembered us in our low estate,” the psalmist writes. That is God remembered and remembers us when we are at our lowest, and then rescues us and sustains us. Now some of you are wondering, “If God is ‘remembering’ us, does that mean at some point God forgot us?”

The short answer is no. When scripture says God “remembers,” it's telling us that God draws upon the past to answer the needs of the present to provide hope for the future. Probably the most famous example of this is when God remembers the covenant with Abraham as a reason to free Hebrew slaves in Egypt, and then leads them to a land of abundance. God remembers, rescues and then provides — drawing upon the past to answer the needs of the present and provide hope for the future. And when we are our most vulnerable, our most in need, our most in trouble ... God remembers, rescues and provides for us, too.

This is part and parcel of who God is, and just one facet

of God's steadfast love — his fierce and unending love — for all of creation.

The world needs the church to love like that now, so now is the time when we need to remember like God does — not just to reminisce, but to see the past — the good and the bad, the beautiful and the brutal — in order to direct our actions in the present and make a better future. Moving forward, we will be tempted to block out the hard memories of this time, but there are things we must remember:

- Most certainly those we've lost, and those who are forced to mourn them from a distance.

- Those who have recovered, and for whom rehab will continue in the weeks and months ahead.

- Those who have had to delay procedures and other care during the time of COVID-19.

- And those for whom this whole experience has been traumatizing. We must remember them.

We also have to remember black Americans, who have experienced the horrors of COVID-19 at a rate much higher than white Americans. The current theory is that certain preexisting conditions, more

prevalent in black Americans than white, are the cause of this disparity, but we have to come to terms with what gave rise to those preexisting conditions. Like the fact that black communities are often food deserts, devoid of healthy, fresh food — because 40 acres and a mule just weren't enough to overcome the evils of chattel slavery and Jim Crow. Or that people of color lost trust in the medical system as they became the unwitting test subjects for medical experimentation throughout the 20th century. We need to remember that being black in America during the time of coronavirus meant you faced a *much* higher chance of dying, and then act to change that morbid injustice in the present so that we *all* have a future filled with justice and renewed life.

I hope we'll remember that being a person in power and a leader are *not the same thing*. We've seen plenty of failure by those in power: those who only look and sound the part, those who place ideology over human well-being and those put in charge only because they raised their hands first. We have.

But we've also seen leaders of high character and capabilities step up to the challenge:

- The already-exhausted scientists, doctors and nurses working to save lives and stop the spread through education. And then volunteering in hot zones.

- The neighbors organizing dinners in driveways, stuffed

animal hunts in the neighborhood and meals for those struggling in this time.

- Navy captains who put their crew ahead of their career, record and livelihood

- And here at Village, folks who have stepped up, to care in new ways for people in spirit, mind and body.

We've seen the pretenders and ideologues falter, but we've also seen real deal leaders care for their communities. May it cause us to rethink our views about what makes for a good leader in the present, and may that guide us in the future.

I hope every single day we remember those with ongoing needs. Social distancing has required some significant changes by all of us, but there was a hot minute there when we couldn't decide if those changes were worth it. There was a very loud subset in our country treating older folk, the chronically ill and immunocompromised as utterly disposable, asking if it was not more reasonable to sacrifice them on the altar of the economy. I'm glad we chose social distancing; I don't know if the soul of the nation could have recovered from the alternative. We shouldn't forget that part of our past, to see how the ailing and aged are treated in the present, so we can change our prejudices in the future.

Finally, we must remember the economically vulnerable. We can recover from the economic toll of distancing, but it will take time, so we have to remember to struggle through

this together. This means caring for business owners searching for ways to keep workers employed; for those a part of corporations with "restructuring" plans always at hand; and most certainly those struggling to pay their bills and feed their families.

Before COVID-19 reached America, we knew there was another crisis lurking: countless Americans living paycheck to paycheck as basic needs became more and more expensive, who could not handle an emergency expense. That warning became reality when COVID-19 arrived.

So, we cannot forget those who will be climbing out of a hole in the months and years to come. If you've got a ladder to lend, now's the time. And if you need a ladder, don't be ashamed; you didn't dig this hole. Friends, we cannot let each other fall between the cracks. So we have to remember each other, and change our present, so that we all might have hope for a better tomorrow.

In these trying times, there is good news. God remembers, rescues and provides for all of us. When we are at our lowest, even in the valley of the shadow of death, God draws upon the past to answer the needs of the present, and give us hope for the future.

God has not forgotten you. You are not alone in this. God is with you, and God is for you.

And it is that truth that sustains us and challenges us to do likewise every day. That

might feel like a big task in the midst of the confusion, grief and lament of this moment. But I truly believe it will help us find our way through the pain and questions.

Today we'll gather around our tables to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear Jesus' words yet again: "Remember me." So let us remember his life ... his ministry to the vulnerable and hurting ... his death and resurrection. Let us not forget the way *he* remembered the past into the present and changed the future — and then go and do likewise. Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.