

The Power of Remembrance From Psalm 77

In my last sermon as your Sr. Pastor, I want to speak to you about the power of remembrance. In both the Old and New Testaments, a spiritual discipline that is central to our individual walks with God is that we are to take times to remember. We are to remember especially what God has said about himself in His Word, i.e., who He is, what He has done, how He has called us to live and what He has promised.

Throughout the Bible, we discover that we who follow Jesus are to remember God both in times of great difficulty as well as in times of celebration. Today, I want us to see that it's also in times of change and transition that we are also to remember -- remember that God is with us and that he will guide us.

We are most certainly in a time of change, aren't we? In one of my first messages to you 12 years ago, I called these times "ecotonic moments". Do you remember that? An ecotone is ***a place at which two ecosystems come together, where they meet and blend into one another. It is a place unstable, shifting, and fragile but also fertile, characterized by diversity and change and new kinds of life.*** A good example is when you travel from east to west across Nebraska and Colorado, you drive across many miles of flat prairie land and lakes until, almost suddenly, the flatlands are interrupted by the rise of the Rockies. That is an ecotone, where the plains meet the mountains. An ecotone is a place of change -- of transition. <https://20dqe434dcuq54vwy1wai79h-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/iStock-1046683492-1024x683.jpg>

As Dr. Bill Iwan of LAC and Caltech said to me the first time I mentioned this concept, "When you come to an ecotonic space, one decision you have to make is about what you must carry from the earlier place into the new one and what you must leave behind." He was right. If you are kayaking along a river in flat areas and come to a mountain you must climb, you won't want to carry your kayak up the mountain with you -- but you will want food, water, shoes, etc.!

With my leaving as your Sr. Pastor, Pastor Jeff stepping in as Acting Sr. Pastor, and the Sr. Pastor Search Committee at work, this truly is an "ecotonic moment" at Lake. I am convinced that one of the most important things we can do right now is to remember what God has said to us. What do we carry from this "ecotonic moment" in our church into the next as a church? I am convinced that, in terms of what we believe, the word for what we carry is "gospel". That word means "good news" from God. The gospel is what our LAC Statement of Faith is all about. So, in these days, I want you to back to that again and again. Here's where you can find it: <https://www.lakeave.org/about/what-we-believe> Here's the introduction to it:

Through the power of the gospel, God accomplishes His salvation plan: rescuing His people from sin, making each one complete in Christ, and making all things in His creation new. Our most basic theological convictions are aspects of the gospel. Whatever else we are, we must always be a gospel-centered church.

But, in addition to that, I've been seeking to remember what the Lord has said to us together over the past 12 years. I've thought about many of them. So today, let me bring back to your memory, three specific messages that have been central to our years together.

Unexpected Family -- *I bow my knees before the Father, from whom the entire family in heaven and on earth is named... (Eph 3:14). I looked and beheld a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne... (Rev 7:9)!*"

As a 13-year-old boy, one Saturday morning I was forced to stop and talk with a group of African American men in Bluefield, WV. As I turned the corner that day and found myself face-to-face with them, I wanted to run out of fear. I had never before had a conversation with a person of color. We often fear what we do not know. One of the men looked me in the eye and said, "Young fella, I have some advice for you: You should sit down with us now, have a nice cool bottle of pop, and talk for a while. And, I think you'll find out -- that we're just folks." So, I did, i.e., I sat down and talked. And I found out too -- not just that they were "folks" -- but they were my brothers in Christ. My eyes were opened that day and a dream began to grow in my heart, i.e., to be in a church this side of heaven that is as diverse as our Father's eternal family is and always will be in heaven.

So, in one of my first series of messages, I brought you into that dream with me. It was from the Book of Ephesians and I entitled it, "God's Unexpected Family." That is not to say that the breadth of God's family is unexpected to him. No, in Ephesians, we learned that it has been God's plan since eternity past to adopt children into his family from every people group.

A church like ours should be unexpected because the world sees it and can hardly believe that we love one another, worship our God together and serve to his glory together. Back in Ephesus when the Bible was written, the people didn't want to be in one family -- because there were both Jews and Gentiles who had surrendered their lives in faith to Jesus. But, they wanted two churches -- one Jewish and one Gentile! However, God placed that church in Ephesus and called both Jew and Gentile to walk together in unity. When that kind of thing happens, the world will see it and know that there must be a God who has done it. That's what the family of God is -- people who once were divided from God and from one another, now one family in Christ.

Here's the application to us: God has now placed us here in Pasadena, CA, one of the most diverse cities in our world and he has adopted us into his one family. He unites here us in Christ to make known to the San Gabriel Valley that God can take what is broken and bring it together.

Never forget this: When God adopts us into his family, he leaves the breadth of diversity that he's created us with: We are made up of different ethnicities, different physical appearances, different gifts, different generations, etc. But, he unites us as members of one family in Christ. And, he plants us into this neighborhood and tells us to live, serve and worship in unity so that people might see that God is real and see what he is like.

So, when a "baby boomer" does not want to worship with a "millennial", when the documented doesn't want to worship and serve with undocumented, and when the wealthy person doesn't want to worship with the family close to homelessness, you must remember. Remember who we are. We all bow our knees before the one Father in heaven and earth from whom we all derive our name (**Eph 3:14**). We imperfect people are only in God's unexpected family because of God's grace. And we will be in it together -- throughout eternity!

Three Essential Connections -- *We proclaim Christ, both warning each one and teaching each one with all wisdom, so that we may present each one complete in Christ* (**Col 1:28**).

I asked you the question, "When you breathe, which is more important -- inhaling or exhaling?" You know the answer, i.e., they are equally important. With that in mind, remember that the church is not only called a family, it is also called a body. And, as a spiritual body, it must both inhale and exhale to be healthy.

The three essential connections focus on the inhaling part of your spiritual life. One of the reasons God places us into a local church like this one is that each one of us needs to grow in our faith. We come in to church to breathe in the truth of God. That means learning the truth about God from the Word, learning how to use the gifts God has given you, etc. But, it also means that, at church, you should begin to grow to live as God has created you to live. This and more is what we mean by becoming "complete in Christ."

There are many ways that God enables you to grow and develop in your spiritual life. We believe that there are three that are essential to each one of us. I want you to remember them -- and make them a part of your life:

1. **Worship** -- By this, we urge each one of us regularly to worship in one of our 4 worship services, 3 in English and 1 in Spanish at Comunidad. This means that we think it is essential for your growth and for our witness that you meet not just in your small groups, classes or youth gatherings. The unity of our body is formed as we worship our one Father in unity. As **Heb 10:25** commands: *Do not give up meeting together. Some have gotten into the habit of doing this... Meet together even more as you see Christ's return approaching.*
2. **Community** -- By "community", we mean our smaller group gatherings like we have from our students to senior adulthood here at Lake. The Bible calls us to teach one another, correct one another, pray for one another, etc. That cannot all happen in a larger worship service. I know that, with our growing number of people who worship with us online, we will need to see how this essential connection might be facilitated. But, if we will fulfill our mission to have each one of us become complete in Christ, we believe that both worship and community are not optional extras but essential connections.
3. **Service** -- In **Eph 4:7-16**, we are told that when we receive Jesus into our lives, he gives us His Spirit. The Spirit gives each of us gifts, spiritual gifts. Why? So that "we will grow up in our faith (**Eph 4:13**)." So that "we will no longer be babies in the faith (**Eph 4:14**)." This is all to say that, just as exercise is essential to the physical body's growth, so service is essential to your growth in Christ.

So, remember: Three essential connections. Many have told me that it's too hard to do all three. However, as one single Mom said, "I see that these three connections are all essential to my spiritual growth and to my children's. So, we have decided to commit to all three and discovered -- that, as hard as doing all three is, there

are other things much harder that I do as a single Mom. Doing them is changing our lives and drawing us together. We have to be creative -- but we've learned it's possible and it's worth it."

Divine Appointments -- *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)*"
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (Js 1:27).

If the three essential connections are central to us "breathing in" as a church body, I think of "divine appointments" as a perspective central to us "breathing out". What happens in your life at church is to breathe out into blessing in the world. We gather here in church and then go as his ambassadors of reconciliation.

The property we meet on here at LAC was given to us by one of Pasadena's first mayors and one of our first church members, i.e., William Waterhouse. In giving it, he said that he wanted to be sure that this church will always be involved in two things: 1) taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to our community and world and 2) reaching out to meet the needs of whatever people God brings into our city. I think his call is consistent with the mandates of Scripture and the life of Jesus.

When I was a freshman in college, my RA challenged me to read through the Gospel of Luke and make note of each time someone came across Jesus's path. He said to notice 1) how Jesus sees the people, 2) how Jesus treats the people, and 3) whether what Jesus did was different from what others did. Then, he asked me to learn to notice those God brings across my own path. He said, "As it was with Jesus, there will be some that you know you need to stop and enter into their lives. When that happens, view it as a divine appointment. Treat it as an opportunity to tell them about Jesus -- and to meet their needs as you are able in the name of Jesus."

11 years ago, we spent months considering how this looks in our lives in a series I did called *Divine Appointments*. As a church family, God has located us here to give witness to Jesus and call people to have eternal life through him. And, God also calls us to reach out to the needs of those in our city with the love of Jesus. We do this as a church family in many ways. And, I encouraged us all to look at our individual lives that way too -- to see each encounter as a possible divine appointment and each appointment as an opportunity -- to reach out to others in the name of Jesus. Today, I simply say remember, remember to look for those divine appointments. Remember to breathe in here when you worship so that you might breathe out into the world.

Some Final Words: *We remember the past that we might be guided now and into the future.*

Those are the three things that I want you to remember in this time of transition at LAC: Unexpected Family, 3 Essential Connections, and Divine Appointments. But, let me remind you that, when people remembered in the Bible, it was so that they would know how to live now and live into the future. I told you at the beginning of my sermon that **an ecotonic space is fertile, characterized by diversity and change and new kinds of life.**

That is true of this time for us. Have you ever noticed that in those uncertain, transitional times of your life, you often turn to God more fervently? I have. When I'm not quite sure what is next in my life, I turn to the Lord and renew my commitment to him. My most precious times of spiritual growth have been in those times when I knew that I desperately needed the Lord to guide and sustain me. I believe these next months will be like that for us as a church family, a time of "change and new kinds of life" -- if we will let them be. Let's pray as we have never prayed, serve as we have never served, give as we have never given before.

God has a new work for us ahead. Chris and I are excited that we still get to be a part of it. How many pastors leave being Sr. Pastor and still get to be a part of the church they love? Yes, we're not leaving yet! We're just transitioning to a new way of serving God with you in this unexpected family.

So, as this chapter comes to an end, may God bless us all:

- *with His eyes to see people as He sees people,
- *with His heart to care for people as He cares,
- *with hands ready to reach out to people with love as He has reached to us,
- *and with words ready to speak of His good news found in Jesus Christ --

That we together may live as his unexpected family in the San Gabriel Valley -- to His glory!