

Lest You Forget!

When I was younger, I loved the Disney movie *The Lion King*. And by “when I was younger,” I mean when I was 26. I really have no shame in saying this. For any of you who have seen the movie, you know that it’s not really for very young children. It’s dark, often violent, and too scary for a child to watch by himself. But, older children, like myself, can gain a much fuller appreciation for this movie and its message. The movie, of course, is about a family of lions – a royal family. (It can’t be a true Disney movie without royalty involved...). Mufasa – the King – and his wife have a little lion cub named Simba. Unfortunately, this causes tension in the family. Mufasa’s brother Scar is extremely angered that an heir to the throne has been born. Scar had been first in line for the throne, but now the likelihood of his coronation has all but disappeared. Scar hatches a plot to kill Simba. Instead, Scar ends up killing his brother, Mufasa, and convincing Simba that the death is his own fault. Scar tells Simba to run away, never to return. Simba does run away, far away. For years, his life consists of trying to forget his father, trying to forget his past, trying to forget who he was. Simba lives as a nomad in a lush and pleasant land as his father’s kingdom falls into ruin and drought. But, in one especially emotional scene, Simba sees a vision of his father, Mufasa. “Simba, you have forgotten me. You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me...you are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the circle of life. Remember who you are. You are my son and the one true king. Remember who you are. Remember. Remember.”

This illustration helps shine light on an important part of our text. In the end of our text, Moses commands the people of Israel to remember. Remember the things that they’ve seen. Remember the things that they’ve heard. Remember the things they’ve been taught. Remember to teach these things to their children and to their children’s children. This seems easy enough, doesn’t it? It almost seems unnecessary to say. How could the Israelites forget what they had seen? Plagues in Egypt. Salvation at the Red Sea. Miracles in the desert. A mountain, literally shaking, lit up with the presence and glory of the Lord. How could they forget what they had heard? The voice of Moses in front of mighty Pharaoh. The cries of horror as Egyptian firstborn children were killed by the angel of the Lord. The very voice of God himself at Mount Sinai. How could they forget what they had been taught? Moses himself had come down the mountain with instructions written by the hand of God himself. They were taught how to eat, how to love, and how to trust. God’s words and deeds formed their identity as a people.

Yes, it all seems too easy. Do not forget. Remember. But the language Moses uses here is anything but easy. It's nothing to be written off. Literally, his words are, "Only be guarded! Guard your life diligently, lest you forget!" Be guarded! Guard your life *diligently*. In other words, remember, *because your life depends on it*. We have a hard time relating to words like this. Today, we have other things that do the remembering for us. Computers. Blackberries. Cell phones. Technology has made it easy for us not to remember for ourselves. How many of you still know all of your family and friends' phone numbers by heart? I'm sure that a few of you do. But for most of us, we just find the name on our phone and press "call." When we need to remember something else, we just have to look it up on our computer or on the internet. But the words here are impossible to ignore. Remember, *because your life depends on it*.

And the life of the people of Israel did depend on those things. It was God who had struck down the Egyptians with plagues. It was the Lord who had brought them up out of Egypt and through the Red Sea with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. It was the Lord who fed them with manna in the desert and gave them water to drink where there was none. It was the mighty Lord who dwelt on the mountain and struck fear into their hearts as Moses came down the mountain with instruction for them. Without the things that they had seen and heard, they wouldn't be where they were, on the doorstep of the Promised Land. Without the instruction of the Lord, they would simply be like all of the other nations around them. It was remembering these things that made the people who they were. They were God's people. Their very lives depended on it. *Don't forget, lest these things depart from your hearts*.

The people heard Moses. They had promised to keep the instruction of the Lord. They promised to remember the things that the Lord had done and to teach them to their children and to their children's children. And for awhile, they did. They heeded the words of Moses and followed the instruction of the Lord. They remembered the deeds of the Lord and crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They went forth in the faith and hope of their mighty Lord as they walked around Jericho's walls in victory. They settled in the land, renewed the covenant with the Lord, and served the Lord all the days of Joshua and his successors. The peoples around them saw firsthand the mighty deeds of the Lord through the people. Just as the Moses said, the nations saw and marveled, saying, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" They were God's people, and everyone knew it.

Unfortunately, many of you know the sad reality of memories. They fade from our collective memory, and they fade quickly and easily. They fade because we keep them in our minds and not on our lips. And this is exactly what happened to the people of Israel. *And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.* Just like that! A fading memory, not passed on from one generation to the next. None of the people remembered the Lord – what he had done, what he had shown, or what he had taught. Just like that! The collective memory of the people, wiped clean by the death of a generation. The mighty generation of Joshua had seen the great deeds of the Lord at the Jordan, at Jericho, and just about everywhere else. But they kept that memory in their hearts and minds. The words and deeds of the Lord were not on their lips. They failed to pass on the memory. And just like that, they no longer acted like God's people. The fear of the Lord faded away. The desire for righteousness and justice disappeared. Faith was gone in a flash. They forgot the Lord, even though their lives depended on him.

The people simply seemed intent on forsaking and forgetting. But the Lord was intent on remembering, on keeping his Word and covenant. Time and time again, the people did evil in the sight of the Lord and were subjected to suffering. And time and time again, the Lord heard the cries of the people. He remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. *When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

But the people were intent on forgetting. They sought an identity outside of the covenant of the Lord. Solomon forgot God and had the kingdom torn apart for his sons. The people were sent into exile for forgetting the Lord. Ultimately, even when God was among them, in the flesh, the people forsook and forgot the commands of God in favor of remembering their own traditions. They forsook the Lord, leaving him hanging on the cross, forgetting him like he was nothing. The cries of *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from me? Why have you forgotten me?* coming from Jesus' lips apparently confirmed the worst. The Lord Jesus had been completely forgotten. But, yet again, the Lord remained faithful. The Lord is intent on remembering. On the third day, God remembered his servant Jesus. He remembered

his covenant, and he raised Jesus Christ from the dead. *[And the angels said to them, “He is not here, but has risen. **Remember** how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” And they **remembered** his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.*

This morning, we come here knowing how easy it is to forget the Lord. We’ve been through Sunday School as children. We’ve heard the stories. We’ve memorized the verses. We’re taught to remember. We’re given an identity. There was a student who worked harder than anyone in his confirmation class, memorizing, studying, learning. He took his tests. He recited his verses. He stood in front of the congregation, and his baptismal faith was confirmed. And then he had a party. He had graduated. He was done. Done memorizing. Done learning. Done remembering. He could do what he wanted now. Be who he wanted to be. It’s easy to want to do the same, no? We come and hear of the mighty deeds and the instruction of the Lord in this place. But, our memories fade. It remains in our minds, somewhere up there, but it’s not on our lips. We don’t remember the Lord. We forget what he has done in our lives. Given us life. Brought us to the waters of baptism. Forgiven and sanctified us in his Word. Fed us with his body and blood. Given us everything we need to support this body and life. Sometimes we’re intent on forgetting. We live like our lives don’t depend on remembering. And there’s nothing more dangerous than forgetting the Lord.

But, while we might be intent on forgetting, the Lord is intent on remembering. On the cross, faced with being forgotten and forsaken, Christ endured. He remembered his covenant promise to his people. *Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* In the midst of forgetting the Lord, Christ not only died but rose again to live and reign among his people, where his mighty words and deeds would no longer be forgotten. And they can’t be forgotten. Not any longer. *And they **remembered** his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.* The deeds of Christ, both then and now, both for others and for you, can’t be forgotten. You’re marked with Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the one True King. It’s not only in your mind; it’s on your hearts and on your foreheads in Baptism. It’s in your ears through the Word. It’s on your lips in this very meal. The Lord has remembered his covenant *to you*. He’s marked you, and you’re his. Don’t you forget it! Because you’re identity, your life, depends on it. Amen.