

Remembering to Remember

By Bob Rockford

Decoration Day was officially proclaimed on the 5th of May, in 1868, in General Order No. 11. General John Logan, who was the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, wrote the order. Decoration Day was first observed on the 30th of May 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. General Order No. 11 states:

- i. The 30th day of May 1868 is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet church-yard in the land.*

By the late 1800s, many communities across the country had begun to celebrate Memorial Day. After World War I, observances also began to honor those who had died in all of America's wars. In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May.

On the 12th of December 1967, 42 men serving in the U.S military, died in Viet Nam. On that day in the province of Quang Nam a 19-year-old Private First Class in the United States Marine Corp died. He and I graduated 6 months earlier from Ritenour Senior High School in St. Louis. We were on the wrestling team together and received our wrestling letters at the same ceremony. I don't remember much more about him, but this time of the year I sometimes think about Jerry Ziy. His name is listed on Panel 33E, Row 1 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC.

Memorial Day is a day of remembering. The older I get the more memories I accumulate. I remember standing with my grandpa in the hospital parking lot on

October 19, 1954. We were looking up at a window where my dad holding up my new baby brother. The next summer I remember seeing my dad and my uncle throwing my brother back and forth to each other at the swimming pool in Holiday Valley Park. They would let him fall into the water, then reach in and pull him out. My brother would take in a deep breath and just laugh. I also remember the day when my brother was on the High School swimming team and almost drowned at a swimming meet. I remember my mom, who was afraid of water, learning how to water-ski. I remember my dad teaching me how to water-ski, how to drive, and fly an airplane. I remember telling both of them that I had just signed up to go into the Marine Corp. I remember flying in Vietnam as a door gunner on a helicopter. I remember watching sunrises on the flight deck of the USS Iwo Jima in the South China Sea. I remember falling in love with Debbie and getting married at the Rose Garden in Loose Park. I remember the day my daughter was born and I remember being the first one to hold her. I remember her first day of school when I rode with her on the school bus. I remember the day she graduated from Northwest Missouri State University. I remember being hired by Crossroads Church as their first ever Pastor. I remember...well let's just say I have lots of memories.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses stands on the Plains of Moab at the Eastern edge of the Jordan River and delivers a message to the second generation of Israelites. Deuteronomy is the Greek translation of a Hebrew word meaning "second law" or "duplicate law." Moses gives to this new generation a listing of the laws that God gave to Israel in the first four books of the Torah, Genesis through Numbers. One of the central themes in the book of Deuteronomy is "remembering to remember." Moses' intent is for Israel to remember God's faithfulness by remembering the past; remembering their present obligations and remembering the future that God's chosen people might build. Moses tells the Israelites, in Deuteronomy 4, to remember the past.

Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you;

In chapter 6 he tells the Israelites to remember their present.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Then Moses speaks to the People in chapter 8 about the future.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land--a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

What memories do you want to pass on to your children or your grandchildren, and how can you make that happen? And how is this passing on of the memories important to our faith?

The act of remembering gave the people of Israel a way of keeping important events, of the past, in the present. I look at old photos and remember past events, I hold our timeline and I remember what's happened over the past six years; I see the stones the children painted on and I remember thinking that it would be great to put these into cement when we get a new building. Remembering is a community event. Israel gathered and recalled "aloud" the moments that had identified them as God's people. Their identity depended on the God who led them to freedom from Egypt, who gave them the commandments and their

instructions, who gave them life. To forget this God, would mean they would forget their calling. Jesus told his disciples to remember God's work of redemption in his life, in his death, and his resurrection. Luke 22:19 says,

"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Remembering requires discipline. In our fast paced lives we can become distracted, and the very act of remembering becomes more and more difficult. We forget to read life backwards. An old Chinese proverb says, "The simplest ink is more reliable than the finest mind." Don't let the important things around you and within you be relegated to your fuzzy memory. The simple act of writing events down will keep that moment alive. When you journal you can go back and look at important events and see how God has shaped your life by what may or may not have happened. You can pray for those central themes that come up in your journaling, the themes that reveal your heart's desires.

To practice the art of remembering, we need to have time with our family and our friends. To tell others what God has been doing in our lives and hear what God is doing in their lives. When we come to church, worship can be an exercise in remembering. Any gathering of God's people can be an occasion to look at how God is in our lives. We remember how God has been faithful and we tell others. Then we are reminded of who God is through what he has done in our very lives.

What will you remember? What will you put in your journal?

When I bought McNair Wilson's book "Everyone Wants to Go to Heaven, But..." I asked him to sign it. He took the book and scribbled in the front "Bob, The sky is not the limit."

Imagine that nineteen years have passed and it's 2024. We are celebrating our 25th anniversary as Crossroads Church. We are in some sort of sanctuary and

what we are about to do is to remember what has happened to us as a church in the last 25 years.

So I'm asking you to play a game with me called "Remembering to Remember."

What do you remember about the last nineteen years, from 2005 to 2024?

Remember what McNair Wilson said, "The sky is not the limit." The only rules are you need to come up to one of the microphones and tell us your memory, and if you hear a memory you really like and can tag onto that memory you need to jump up and yell "Yes and..." and then tell us more of what you remember of that event.

I'll start things off;

I remember back in 2008 we met our Capital Campaign goal and exceeded that goal by more than \$50,000, and then three years later we had another campaign and we raised \$1,000,000.00. (Bob Rockford)

Yes, and we tripled our congregation size. (Kate Barber)

Yes, and with the increase in congregation size and giving we gave a good portion that money, I believe it was a fourth, to inner city work to provide healthcare for children and support for single mothers. (Jan Wrolstad)

I remember going to Kyle and Wil's wedding. And I remember the day their children became the youth group. (Sharon Jones)

I remember the Barber kids and the Quick kids, and the Klamm kids, and the Hatem kid's all grew up, married and came back and became leaders of the church. And their kids are now the youth group. (Conja Summerlin)

I remember hearing you preach for the first time. (Bob Rockford, Rocky's dad)

I remember going to Guatemala for my tenth time. And we took over 200 sewing machines. (Wil Blackwell)

Yes, and I remember that the Guatemala sewing outreach went to more than just San Lucas. It went to 4 or 5 different cities where we set up sewing centers. (John Dove)

Yes, and the Philippines, plus Africa, plus Iran. (Bob Rockford)

Yes, and it's indicated in some economic textbooks how we changed the economic circumstances of the whole region by just a small sewing machine project. (Kate Barber)

I remember just five years ago we laid the cornerstone for our retirement home. (Mike McVey)

Yes, and Bob Rockford was the first resident. (Sharon Jones)

I remember the worship and prayer services we had for the city because of our creativity and invitations to special worship times at particular times in our country's history or our cities history, and how we were able to minister to the city. (Debbie Rockford)

Yes and the diversity of the churches that took part in those prayer and worship services. There were all dominations and all faiths coming together and represented there. (Jan Wrolstad)

This is not a memory yet, but having Renee growing up here. (Tonya Parman)

I remember when we had a large band playing in our church. All our members were a full size band. (Joe Jennett)

I remember the art exchange we had with all the cities in Guatemala. They sent up to us all the stuff quilt and weaving they did and we sent to them paintings and art that we did. It was a pretty cool exhibit. (Rob Hatem)

I remember some difficult years as we were the lead church in the justice issue in our area in getting the amendment banning gay marriage turned around. We were the lead church, we got a lot of mail and weren't very popular, it was a very painful time. But it was very satisfying to bring justice to that part of our life here in Kansas City. I believe it even rippled into Kansas, and it was quite exciting. (James Wrolstad)

I remember people living in communes and growing their own food. It was real exciting for people who didn't have family here. (Dana Mardock)

I remember when we built our Wailing Wall on the outside of our church building. It had cracks in the stones and people from all over the city would come in their grief and write their prayers on a little piece of paper and stick it in the Wailing Wall. (Terry Rayburn)

Yes, and I remember when we had to move that wall out because it was getting full. (Bob Rockford)

I remember when "Joseph" was performed for the fifth time and Wil Blackwell got enough voice lessons that he got the part of Joseph. (Brad Jones)

I remember only two years after Bob Rockford was honored in Guatemala for starting the sewing machine project. And the many ways it blessed that area. He was called back out of retirement to lead a conference on teaching youth, and being a youth pastor. (Charlie Copeland)

I remember Rose Klamm's 20th birthday. (Sharon Jones)

I remember when a roomful of Crossroad's friends got together and raised money for my friend Tamara to take driving classes. And now she is driving all over the country and talking to people about international relations and going to Law school. (Mary Hatem)

Yes, and I remember before she did that she was driving a truck. (Bob Rockford)

I remember when my son Danny started as a drummer in a rock band. (Mary Hatem)

I remember when the church rented a bus and we all went to New York to see Jonathan Price on Broadway. (Brad Jones)

Think of the memories we will have when we celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary.

I will remember that the sky is not the limit. (Bob Rockford)

Courage means to put one's own heart into the praxis. I would insist that you are in a privileged position; you are the links with the past and, at the same time, the seeds of the future. But the seeds have to fly with the wind, i.e. to go with the Spirit, in order to fall on other, unknown grounds, and yield fruit.

Raimundo Panikkar, "Letter to a Young Monk", Living Prayer (November to December 1986)