

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - MAY 23, 2004
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE! Psalm 105:1-8

How many of you enjoy history? Often when I am in a classroom and ask students what their favorite subject is, history or social studies is usually not among the first to be mentioned.

How many of you enjoy observing and celebrating your birthday. When we are young, we look forward to those birthdays. Year 16 is a big one as is 18 and 21. However, as you get older we don't make such a big deal of them until we get to 62 or 65 and may think about retiring. And then when we hit the 80's and 90's it becomes a badge of honor to tell people how old you are. Do you realize that these birthdays have to do with history? It is the marking of the events, which have occurred in our life during the past 12 months. That is history. Some of us have more history to our lives than others. It all depends on how many years you have lived. The events in our lives are the record of what God has done and how we have responded to his law and to his promises of forgiveness and love.

Our congregation is celebrating a momentous occasion in our history. 150 years this congregation has existed in Watertown. There aren't too many businesses or organizations that are still around after 150 years. As we reflect on our history, we need to **REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE**. As we ponder the words of the psalmist I would like you to consider with me, **I) Why Should We Remember?** And then **II) How Do We Remember?**

WHY SHOULD WE REMEMBER

Why do we have Memorial Day, which is next Monday? So we remember the thousands of soldiers who have fought and gave their lives so that we might be free today and be able to gather here to worship God without fear according to the dictates of our conscience. If we didn't have special days and observance we would quickly forget the sacrifices that these men gave so that we might be free.

Most of us have short memories. We do not remember unless we are reminded. There are so many things happening in our lives everyday that it is very easy to forget what we did yesterday or what happened 15 or 20 years ago. I was reminded of that fact on Friday when was with some former members of the congregation I had served in New Orleans over 23 years ago. They were talking about something that I had done and I did not remember it at all.

It is also very easy to forget what God has done. The psalmist encourages us "Remember the wonders he has done, the miracles and judgments he pronounced." (v. 5) When you don't remember what God has done you forget and you focus more on yourself and what you think you should do and what you have done rather than focusing on what the Lord God has done.

Our faith is anchored in historical facts. What we as Christians believe is not some fairy tale or fable that someone made up. It deals with events that actually took place in time at specific geographical places some of which are still in existence in 2004. When we remember we realize that our faith is not founded on some philosophy or ideas spouted by supposedly learned men. It is founded on God's activity and working in time. When we remember it also helps us to understand why we are the way we are today.

When you study the history of the human race and the beginning of time and civilization and the rebellion that occurred in the perfect world that God had made, then you are better able to understand the world and people

today. You understand that people are basically evil and corrupt. You know why people gossip, curse and swear. You understand why people delight in the misfortunes and troubles of others. That is the basic nature of the creature that we call human.

We also remember so that we don't despair and lose hope. We remember that God as the psalmist writes, "Remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded for a thousand generations." (v. 8) What is that covenant that God remembers? It is the promise that from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would come someone who would be a blessing for all the people of this earth. That someone is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of the first promise that God made to the human race when sin entered this world. As you read all the promises that God made in the Old Testament to rescue and deliver us from sin and its eternal consequences, you find all those promises fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the seed of the woman. He is the one promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the one who would cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which David wrote in Psalm 22 almost one thousand years before those words were uttered by Jesus while suffering the hell we deserve for our sins.

As we celebrate the birthday of our congregation, it is also good to remember what God has done. As the psalmist wrote, "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done." (v. 1) In everyone's family tree or history you find things that you don't talk about. We all have some black sheep. As you look at the 150 years of God's grace to this congregation, you find the same thing. We find pastors and leaders of the church who thought the purpose of the church was to close the taverns and stamp out the use of alcohol. We find others who abused and misused alcohol. We find those who feuded and did not work together in peace and harmony. We find those who were harsh and beat people with the law. It's not always a pretty picture. But through it all you see the hand of God working, loving and forgiving. You can see how God led this congregation to a solid footing on his Word and the realization that the church is here not to make this world a better place but to snatch people from the devil and help them on their personal journey to eternity with Jesus in heaven. You see how God helped this congregation through difficult and trying times financially and kept this congregation strong through two depressions and many economic downturns and problems.

Why is it important to remember those things? The Bible tells us there is nothing new under the sun. Solomon wrote, "Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before." (Ecclesiastes 3:15) What we are facing in 2004 is nothing new for the Christian church. It has been faced before and it will be faced again. The wonderful and comforting news is that God has seen his church through trials like this in the past and he will see his present day church through them also. So we don't despair. We don't throw our hands up and say, "All is lost!" We move forward using the power of God's Almighty Word to change the hearts of all of us and lead us in repentance and a change in the way we think, live and act.

HOW DO WE REMEMBER?

When you see the importance of remembering then the next and important question to address is how does one remember? We recall. We recite. We review.

We remember by recalling. We retell what God has done. Just as the psalmist wrote, "make known among the nations what he has done." (v. 1b) We do this as a congregation every year. Every year we observe Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity. Why? So we don't forget. Some of you have journeyed through the church year 70 or 80 times. This was developed by the early Christians for this very purpose so that we would never forget the great things God has done for us.

We remember by reciting. How many of us know the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds by heart? Why? We recite them over and over again. How many of us know the Lord's Prayer by heart? It is because we pray this over and over again. How many of us can recite the Ten Commandments? We learned them so that we would never

forget what God's will is for us. How many of us know John 3:16, the Gospel in a nutshell by heart? "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This helps us never to forget "I am a child of God and I have everlasting life because Jesus loves me and gave his life for me."

Our memory is also reinforced by song. As the psalmist wrote, "Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice." (Vv. 2-3) How many of the special hymns that you and I love don't we know by heart? "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." "A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon." "I walk in danger all the way. My walk is heavenward all the way." "For all the saints who from their labors rest." All of us have favorite hymns that cause us to remember the great things that God has done for us.

We also remember by reviewing. A birthday is often a time to review as we dig up pictures from the past and look at how we appeared 20 or 50 years ago and how we look today. We talk about events that occurred when we were younger. An anniversary is also a time to review. It is good to look back in the history of our congregation and see what God has done through sinful human beings and the great things he has accomplished in spite of us and using us.

As we have special services throughout this year. It is good to pause and reflect. To understand where we came from so that we can better understand whom we are today and why. It is also good to take that history and hopefully learn from it so that we don't make the same mistakes that have been made in the past. And most importantly we need to remember that this is God's church, not our church. He is in control and he will guide us into our future and we need to remain faithful to his Word and remember the purpose for which this congregation was founded. – To reach those who are lost and without Jesus in this world and to help those who know Jesus in their Christian walk to eternity. Remember the great things God has done.

Amen.