

FEEDING MEMORIES
Sermon, May 17, 2020
Youth Sunday
Deuteronomy 6:1-9, John 21:15-25, Romans 8:12-17

I said this at least twice before on this particular Sunday of the calendar, but I'll say it again: Tomorrow is Memorial Day, when we honor the memory of those of our armed forces who gave their lives to secure the liberation and defend the freedom of so many, including us, around this world over the years. I'm personally convinced the best thing we can do to show our gratitude and honor their memory is to exercise our freedom responsibly and well ... we want to see freedom not so much as the right to do as we choose, but as the opportunity to choose to do what is right. Let me reiterate: Freedom is not so much the right to do as we choose as it is the opportunity to choose to do what is right.

And today is Youth Sunday. I want to especially thank all the dedicated volunteers and church staff, all the devoted parents and family members, all the good friends and loving church members who are doing all they can to help the young women and men entrusted to this church's care to learn to exercise **their** freedom responsibly and well. Thank you to all who have been working to help them learn to choose what is good and right, to train them up in the way they should go, by encouraging them to become young men and women of Christian faith, integrity and honor ... and thank you, in deference to our reading from Romans, for being **Heir Conditioners** ... "Heir" as in one who receives an inheritance. Romans 8:16 *"... the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."* It is literally in the Will of God that, in Jesus Christ and through the giving of His life, we are made heirs. And in a nutshell, it might be said that's what the ministry of this church is all about ... helping all of us, but especially our young people, to be worthy heirs, conscientious stewards of our rich and glorious inheritance ... an inheritance, by the way, we begin to receive and enjoy in THIS life and right on into eternity.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus asking Peter three times, *"Do you love me?"* Peter, who had earlier made a three-fold denial, is here given opportunity to make a three-fold affirmation and confession of his faith and love. Note that each time Peter answers, Jesus responds with a directive. He tells Peter to **do** something. Jesus knows His forgiven followers need something to DO. More specifically, as we are beings created in the image of the creator God, Who is always active, productive, at work for His purposes and fully engaged with His world, Jesus knows we, His forgiven followers, need to be working, creating, producing, engaged in serving; we need to be about God's work to be fulfilled. *(As a bit of an aside, in my sermon the week after Easter "Don't Live! You Might Die!" I made the comment: "Do we realize how against our nature this whole [quarantine] thing is? Human beings in general and Christians in particular are not designed, not created, to sit around behind locked doors trembling in fear." My hyperbolic sermon title was borrowed from an excellent commentary I had read; I didn't go into the contents other than to acknowledge use of the title and its implication ... that we are meant to go out and LIVE, to make a living, to **do good** with the life we have, as nobody gets out of this life alive. And I encouraged us all to pray our representatives will make wise, balanced and life-enhancing decisions. I'm so **glad** our President recognized ours as an **ESSENTIAL BUSINESS** this past Friday! By the way, we are finally open for worship next Sunday ... watch for details!)*

Imagine Jesus saying, *"Yes, Peter, I know you have denied me. I know you have sinned. However, let's not dwell on your past. Don't let your past have a future. It is past, it is forgiven ... now, let's go **do** something, and get what is past **BEHIND** you! Do what I am calling you to do. **Feed My lambs.**"* Feed my lambs, Peter. Make certain my young sheep are fed, nurtured, cared for. On every Youth Sunday I like to note how so much of what this church is about is feeding Jesus' lambs, about teaching our children the matters of faith and life. "Teach Your Children" was a Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young hit years ago, which I am not going to sing for you at this time. The opening lyrics: *"You who are on the road **must have a code that you can live by.** And so, become yourself, because the past is just a goodbye. Don't you ever ask them why. If they told you, you will cry. So just look at them and sigh, and know they love you."* Now, this is not a sermon about families, nor is it a sermon about parenting. This is a sermon about a generation of children **growing up to have a code to live by**, a generation of children growing up to know and love God. In the family of God, *every one* of us plays a role in that. It doesn't matter whether we are married or single, whether we are young or not-so-young ... by virtue of our promises made at every baptism, the responsibility of feeding the lambs of this church belongs to us. **All** of us. **WE ARE PETER.**

At the outset of today's service we read from Deuteronomy 6. The book of Deuteronomy was Moses' farewell address to the people he loved and cared about, people he had been "on the road" with for forty years. They were about now to leave that wilderness road and pass on into the Promised Land, but Moses knew he wouldn't be going with them. These are a record of his final words to them ... words he no doubt chose quite carefully, for these words would have to carry the people further into the future than Moses himself could. I can almost imagine Moses pulling out a guitar and singing, "*You who were on this road must have a code that you can live by.*" But what he *wouldn't* go on to sing was "*And so, become yourself, because the past is just a goodbye. Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry. So just look at them and sigh and know they love you.*" Moses wanted to give them a much more substantial code to live by than that of their own limited human perspective, he wanted parents to be able to do so much more than to just look at their children and "Sigh," never to question "why" they do or say certain things nor give any substantial direction and just hope for the best! He wanted them to give their kids purpose, meaning, direction, hope and a future. Moses wanted the children of his "congregation" to live *joyfully, well, responsibly and forever!* Knowing he couldn't go with them into their future, he wanted to ensure they would have the best, and really, the only, code there is to live well by.

So in Deuteronomy 6, Moses comes to his main point: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments 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; bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* " In other words, make sure as your children come and go that they are constantly and continually and consistently confronted and engaged with your conversation about God and His good commandments, so that it may go well for you and your future for years to come. Let them know the code YOU live by. As Moses knew, there is no more important investment for the future well being of the community than the investment we make in our children. That's true for the community at large and it is especially true for the religious community (*that's another part of why this quarantine is so painful to me as we are unable to have our children present in worship!*). How do we fulfill such a responsibility? How do we impress the love of God to the hearts of this next generation? How can we do that? If nothing else, we make every effort to give them a code, a good code, the *best* code, to live by.

If you've been in this congregation for awhile, you'll also know I've long been convinced that one of the most effective ways we do that, one of the most effective ways we can invest in the ministry of "heir conditioning," is to do all we can to provide *joyful* memories, *good* memories, wholesome memories. Memories of joy, memories of happiness, memories of service in mission, memories of healthy relationships, memories of good clean fun, memories of wholesome and enjoyable activities, memories of loving, supportive, lasting friendships (*and NOT memories of computer screens!*) as well as good memories of adults who love and encourage and nurture and build up, rather than bad memories of adults who misuse or abuse or discourage and communicate they don't want them around. All while talking about the good things of God. Such happy memories of joy in our pasts do much to help condition us to live joyfully, confidently and freely in our presents and our futures.

We are all about making happy memories of laughing *with* God, sharing His joy, and enjoying our glorious inheritance as He would have us enjoy it ... for He really does want us to live well, to enjoy life in all its fullness, beginning right now and continuing on into eternity! We have no interest in memories of life lived laughing *at* God, which is a sad phenomenon in our increasingly secularized culture. When we laugh *at* God, when we join with the secular, cynical voices that mock piety, scoff at morality, ridicule chastity, integrity, honor, reverence and basically make light of God and His good ways ... in short, when we don't take God *seriously* and live our lives accordingly ... more often than not that makes for really *bad* memories, regretful memories, destructive memories, painful memories, memories that continue to wound and cripple rather than heal and/or inspire. People laugh *at* God when they take Him lightly, when they don't understand Him, or they cynically laugh and/or scoff at God because they think He is hopelessly irrelevant to their situation(s). I'm also convinced *ONLY* those who take God seriously really understand the sheer delight of laughing with God, enjoying His good gifts, living life as He designed it to be lived.

Making good memories. That's a large part of what we try to do here. What a way to choose to use our freedom. What a way to honor the sacrifice of those we honor tomorrow. And what a way to honor the sacrifice of the One who made the ultimate sacrifice that we might receive this rich and glorious inheritance.