

Sermon Text for June 28, 2015

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Peter 3:1-7, Genesis 7:17-8:5

“God Remembers”

I need to share a story with you about one of our programs. The Well has been a crucial place of hospitality and welcome for this church over the past 3 years. We have civic servants taking a break in there during grueling hours, we have at risk teens who find this an oasis in the midst of their storms of life, the women’s group executive committee of Strasburg meets in there, our circles, kids doing homework, preschool moms home schooling, every imaginable demographic group in this community finds itself at one time or another in The Well.

For the first time in its existence it has not been self-sufficient for the first 6 months of this year. The income has been at about what we have had over the past 3 years but it is being used so much more now than ever, that it just is not keeping up with itself. Those who are using The Well just aren’t putting money into the donation bin, and that’s okay, just that since more and more people are using it, then those costs are bound to rise. The ministry continues, but now, for the first time in its history, at a cost.

At the last session meeting we discussed this and decided to have a limited budget placed upon The Well so that the costs don’t absolutely skyrocket, which of course means in turn that its ministry will also be only within certain parameters. So I need to tell you I was questioning a bit what the purpose of God’s provision was for The Well, and what the solution for this problem just might be. I have always seen God meet needs when they arise, and I was wondering why God was holding out on this one.

Wednesday morning I got a phone call from a representative of our Presbytery who said, and I am not lying, “The Presbytery has money that they are trying to give away for worthy projects.” This week I have been working feverishly to finish up the grant process and to see if we just might be able to access some of that grant money. But as I was writing the grant do you know what I realized? There I was after session meeting wondering if God had forgotten us in what I considered a crucial piece to a ministry of hospitality that this church offers. And what happened? Right on time God gave us an opportunity that we could pursue. How convicting it was for me and I think I’m pretty good at allowing God to provide without worrying about it, even in those times

when it doesn't seem like it will happen. I guess I just forgot about God's historical faithfulness in my life in these matters. Today I have good news, regardless of how often we forget God's faithfulness, God never, ever forgets us.

We are continuing in Genesis. Last week we saw that Noah was given the commandment to build an ark which he obediently did. Because of Noah's obedience God is able to save humanity. This week we find Noah, his family, and all of creation and the kitchen sink, literally, on the ark. It is starting to get old in there, it may have been exciting at first but now Noah and his family are probably wondering if God had forgotten them. But Scripture tells us that God remembered Noah, and Scripture tells us that God remembers even us when the flood waters are up to our necks and it seems as if no one can save us. We discover again today what it means when we say that God remembers us.

I know that most of you today will leave disappointed because you want me to address the recent Supreme Court decision. I'm not going to. You know where I stand, you know where your session stands, and I want to thank Bill Rouse for an incredibly jarring dose of reality as you each walking into the sanctuary this morning being reminded of what is more important than anything that makes the headlines. We were reminded of what Jesus spoke more about than anything else, and that is that we have, many do not have anything. And when we focus on these issues that Jesus never addressed, we are bound to forget what he said is the most important, that we take care of those around us, especially those who are hungry and in need. They are the forgotten ones. Let's try to remember that today, and I'm sorry if you leave disappointed.

In 1998 I had an experience that will forever shape my life, and I will never forget it. I was a pastor in Italy near Salerno. The rains had come and they had come and they had come and a number of hillsides had decided to come down from their perch. The mud avalanche that followed had no respect for the fact that there was a village below that had been there for hundreds of years. The village was completely wiped from the face of the earth. From far away you could not tell that there was once people living and enjoying life on that hillside in their houses. Being the only Protestant on site I was taken up in a helicopter to view the area and then on foot on top of the village which was now 10-20 feet below a path of baked mud upon which I was walking. They were still looking for bodies when I got there. The village was no longer a village but rather it had

been absorbed by the mountain, as if the mountain had reclaimed its space. The village had been wiped out of history. I considered it a type of natural amnesia whereby anyone walking there would never know that they were walking on houses buried beneath them. History would quickly forget.

Today in Genesis we pick up the story with the flood waters covering the entire face of the earth and the ark is bobbing not only over submerged and soon to be forgotten civilizations of people now dead for over 40 days, but the ark was floating even above the highest mountain range known at that time called Ararat. All of humanity, or as Scripture states, everything that had the breath of life which is a direct reference to Genesis 2 when God breathes the breath of life into Noah, all that was made even in the image of God was destroyed. Everything was wiped out. The most complete natural amnesia the earth had ever seen had just taken place. All the evil, the wickedness, the immorality that was a part of the old earth, was gone.

Had God forgotten the earth? The destruction was complete and today in history when people face that type of destruction the question arises: Has God forgotten South Carolina, has God forgotten Palestine, has God forgotten some of the inner cities in the US, has God forgotten Nepal? For the people under the water it sure seemed that way. For the creation no longer living the answer would have to be yes. Maybe even for Noah there was a time that it seemed that God had forgotten him and his family and all of creation, literally, bobbing away on that water. Scripture states that it rained 40 days and nights but the waters were covering the land for 150 days. Maybe when they first went in the ark it was fun and exciting to see everyone together. We would take cross country trips as a family in our old Volkswagon van when I was kid growing up. One time the six of us with our dog drove from Atlantic City New Jersey to Vancouver British Columbia, another time 4 of us drove from Atlantic City to Tegucigalpa Honduras. It was fun the first few hours, lying down in the bed we had made in back with the dog who always had his nose out. But when those hours stretched out into days we would each find ourselves thinking in the back of our minds: Why are we doing this? It took us 10 days to get there. It took us 3 days to get back. That should tell you how much fun it ended up being at the end.

Noah was feeling isolated, forgotten, maybe even lonely. Loneliness or the feeling of being forgotten may be the most painful, terrible feeling that anyone can go

through. Most people have times in their lives that they wonder if God himself has forgotten them. Remember Jesus: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? All of creation in Genesis 7 was going through that experience, Noah included. What a feeling, what an abysmally lonely feeling it is being forgotten, thinking nobody remembers you.

The same can be said in churches. You know that there are people who have attended her regularly but then for a period of time they just stop coming. We know who they are, and most of the time we do nothing about it. It is a logical easy step for them to say, you know, they forgot me, nobody cares if I come or not. It is our job to prove to those who have not been here in a while to reach out to them. Each one of us here should take the initiative and call or visit those who are on the periphery.

But smack in the middle of our text we find in 8:1 the verse that sets us, Noah, and all of creation free and gives us hope. We read: and God remembered Noah. God remembered. How many of us here today need to hear that God remembers them? How many of us can only rely on God's memory for survival? We need to hear that God remembers Bob...From then on in the story things only get better. God blows on the water and the waters subside, the waters begin to recede and the tops of the mountains begin to appear again. Just when it seems that all is lost God remembers us and we are able to see the mountain tops again. We cannot be ultimately forgotten, for with God we are eternally known. We find all through the Scriptures this term repeated over and over again: God remembers. In Hebrew it is one word: yazar. And when God remembers, people are saved.

In II Peter the author states that the reason he was writing was to...look at vs. 1, to remind you of all that God and God's people have done in the past. Peter is writing to remind. The one who constantly forgets is not God, but me, you. We are the ones who suffer from a terrible short term memory loss where we have to be reminded time and time again what God has done for us. The Well is one example where God has told us and shown us over and over again that if the project is of God, then God is going to bless it and we will not run short on finances, enthusiasm, and people coming to Christ through fellowship and the healing of souls. When God remembers, and God always remembers, people are saved.

God remembered Noah and the flood waters abated. Do you remember when Jesus is hanging on the cross and the crook on one side was making fun of him.

Remember, what the other thief said to Jesus in his dying words: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Brothers and sisters, fellow sinners, rejoice because the good news of the Gospel that we hear in Genesis today is that God remembered Noah and so we can be assured that we are remembered even when the flood waters are crashing in around us in our life.

Jesus’ blood serves for us as the flood waters served for the earth. His blood washed us clean and saved us and allowed God to forget our sins and remember that we are his children and the sheep of his pasture. The blood of Jesus is stronger than any flood water just like the resurrection of Christ is stronger than death.

God’s memory is for us the last ground of hope in the realm of death. We can be assured that God remembers us and so we know that God will deliver us. May God bless and keep us as we remember his presence in our lives. Amen.