

Sermon- January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020-

Our memories are incredible aren't they. I can remember waking up on my third birthday and walking down the dark hallway of my childhood home and seeing my birthday present on the kitchen table; I don't remember what it was, but the moment I seeing the gift is so vivid. I can recall the taste of my mother's chocolate chip cookies, even though I haven't physically eaten one in over seventeen years. I can recall the combination to my high school locker, not so much the numbers but the pattern of turns which were needed in each direction to unlock it. There are times in my life when I cannot recall where I left my keys that I just put down, but give me an original Nintendo control and I could still put in the cheat code in for my favourite games (up, up, down, down, left-right, left right, B, A, Start)

It is incredible what our memories can do. Its incredible how we can remember the faces of people we have not seen in years. How we can recall the way the trees looked outside our grandparents' home. It is also incredible how little it takes for us to unlock a dormant memory; one that we thought we forgot about, but was just filed away. With a simple whiff of a particular smell we can be transported in our minds to a particular place, time or experience. The taste of something in one place, can bring memories of another in the snap of a finger. Seeing something in this moment, something so simple so normal, can remind us of an event or situation from years ago.

We can forget the biggest of details and yet remember the smallest of feelings. We can totally forget what we did yesterday, but still remember what the wind felt like on your face as you skied down the mountain on that perfect day twenty years ago. We can forget a person's name, but remember what colour shirt they had on. Our memories are incredible they hold so much information about who we are and what we have done. Yet what's most interesting to me, is that for all the details I can remember, in all of those moments when something brings me back to a memory from days gone by; it is almost never words. Words can inspire us and enliven us and we can find incredible meaning in words, but it would seem that our memories are grounded first in feelings in experiencing` .

Now I have nothing to back that statement up; I have no studies or unbiased research that can prove to you that our memories are connected first to feelings or experiences rather than words, and realistically I am certain that for some folks words do have a more prominent role in memories. Over this past week though, as I thought about memories that I have, and as I have talked to a couple of people about their memories, what seems to be the most vivid and lasting and most truthful part of our memories is the feelings connected to them. As an example, I had a memory of my childhood in the months leading up to Christmas. When my sister with us I asked her about her memory of the exact same moment. Everything we remembered about the particular moment in our lives was different; what we remembered the room to look like was different, what we remember being said was different, even who else was present was different; yet what was the exact same was how we remembered feeling in that moment.

Human beings are feeling based beings. How many times have you heard someone say something along the lines of, "Something about this situation just doesn't feel right?" or "the hair on the back of my neck is standing up." Maybe in a difficult situation in your life, you cannot recall words that were shared with you in that tough moment but you absolutely can recall the way you felt when your friend stood with you. Human beings are experiential based beings, we can hear about situations or places from friends, but it is not as significant to hear about whatever it is, as it is to experience it. That is why we have phrases in our language like, "I won't believe it, until I see it for myself," or "Oh my

goodness this tastes awful, try it.” Words can convey meaning and substance, but often full understanding comes when we experience things first hand; when we feel them for ourselves. Which is why, I believe our memories are important, because they are full of feelings and experiential understanding of those important moments in our lives and those feelings guide us.

I know that from my own experiences and my own memories, but I also know that because of our biblical passage today. Jesus I believe fully understood the human condition, fully understood that if the people who were to follow him would do so with all of their hearts, they not only needed to listen, but they needed to experience with their eyes, their feelings, their entire beings, the full measure of who Jesus was; today’s passages highlight that for us.

It begins with John the Baptist talking a lot about who Jesus is. There is an image that comes to mind whenever I read this passage for in John’s Gospel, John the Baptist is not presented to us as a loner in the desert, but instead as a one who has followers himself. The image then that comes to mind is of John the Baptist standing with a number of his followers and he sees Jesus walking by and upon seeing him he points him out to his followers by saying, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I have said, “after me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me. I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel. I saw the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and I testify to you that this is the Son of God.” That is a great introduction, but what happens? Nothing. None of those followers are immediately moved by his words. It’s not until the next day, when once again Jesus walks and John the Baptist says to his followers again, and this is a paraphrase, “There he is again, the Lamb of God. Go follow him, learn from, don’t stand here with me, because that man is the Son of God.”

And these two followers listen, they begin to follow Jesus around Bethany. And then this amazing interaction happens, Jesus notices that he is being followed and so he turns and confronts them and says, “What are you looking for?” I want to stop right there for a moment, because that wording is really important. Jesus asks them what they are *looking* for, he doesn’t preach at them, he doesn’t show them a sign, he doesn’t prove to them that all of John’s words about him are true, instead he wants to know what they need to see in order to believe. Their response, seems a bit odd, but they say is “Rabbi, where are you staying?” It does seem odd, but for me it also speaks to their need to experience Jesus fully not just to hear him speak, or see him walk by, but to be in his presence, to learn about him by engaging all of their senses and what’s just awesome about this account is that Jesus understands that, because his response to them, is not say, well let me tell you where I am staying, or let tell you whether or not John’s impression of me is right, no he says, “Come and see.” Come and see for yourselves who I am. Don’t just take John’s word for it, don’t even just take mine, come and see for yourselves who I am. Listen to what you body, your senses, your mind and your hearts tell you about me, by being in my presence, come and see for yourselves.

And what’s incredible about this account is that the text tells us nothing more about what took place that day between Jesus and these two followers. Then went with Jesus and remained with him for the better part of that day and I am certain that they talked with him and listen to him, but the text tells us very little; the same text which went into great detail when John the Baptist was talking about Jesus, remains almost silent about what they went and saw. All we know is that at the end of the day one of them runs to his brother and says, “we have found the messiah,” and he physically brings his brother to meet Jesus, not to just take his word for it, to be in his presence. This forces me to acknowledge that

they knew Jesus to be the messiah not because John told them so, not because Jesus told them so, but because they could feel it, they could feel God's presence with him and around them; they experienced the divine.

I cannot escape that that belief, because it occurs again and again in scripture. There is a passage at the end of Luke's Gospel, known to us as the Road to Emmaus, where two of Jesus followers leave Jerusalem after Jesus execution; they are fleeing the city, unable to bear what has occurred and are worried for their own safety, and they meet stranger who we know to be Jesus, who walks with them and talks with them. But when they discover who he is, they say to one another, "Were not our hearts burning while he was speaking to us." They don't recall the words he shared, but the feelings they had. Elsewhere in Scripture his happens as well, St. Paul, notes a couple of times how he felt in the presence of Christ on the Road to Damascus. The Hebrew scriptures are filled with descriptions of how people fell to their knees, overcome with the emotions of being in the presence of God.

My point friends is this. We know in the depths of our hearts and our minds the importance of a any given situation in our lives, because of the feelings attached to it; because of how we remember that experience and because we remember how it felt. The same should be said for one's faith. Like those first disciples who met with Jesus, there belief in him was not grounded in what John the Baptist could say about him. It was not rooted in what they could tells others about him, their faith in Jesus was rooted in how they felt in his presence. We do not come to belief because we read scripture, we come to believe by reading the emotions found in the memories of those who experienced Jesus first hand; we come to believe because from those feelings expressed on these pages we then connect them to our own experiences our own feelings about the times when we have felt our hearts burning, times when we have to run to say to another come and see.

You know I bet, if I polled every person that was in attendance on Christmas eve what the words of sermon were, that less then 10% of people could tell me. But I also bet that 100% of people in attendance that night could articulate how they felt when we lit those candles and sang silent night. And I would even venture to say that the vast majority of people would say they felt the same things; peacefulness, grace, love, warmth.

Ture faith is not about being able to find the right words, or being able to quote scripture from heart, or being able to say the right things in prayer. True faith comes when we experience the divine and feel that grace around us. And that happens in so many different ways; it comes in the beauty of sunrise or sunset, it comes in the warm hug of a friend in tough time, in comes in the incredible strength it takes a song bird to sing on a frozen branch, it comes over and over and over again. God does not tell us what to believe, but like Jesus, invites us to come and to see and to feel. May those feeling of being in the presence of God, be memories that we not only hold dear, but share with others. May these feelings be what guides us to seek justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God and with one another always. For that is true faith is all about. Amen.

