

“Remembering & Envisioning: An Ongoing Challenge”

Text: Psalm 105:1-6; 37-45

Remembering & Envisioning: An Ongoing Challenge.
I don't know about you...but sometimes I wonder what certain parts of the Bible really mean...I mean seriously...how are they practical and meaningful for us today?

Often it's the details of some biblical stories that get me to wondering...I was rereading the Noah story in Genesis this week and there we're told that Noah was instructed to build an ark of cypress wood and it was to have rooms and everything inside and out was to be covered with pitch...

At one level...who cares? Right? I don't mean to sound disrespectful...because even the foot note at the bottom of my Bible's page indicates that the meaning of this is uncertain.

When it comes to our text for today...I wonder about the closing verses... *God gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples...*

To be real...Tara and I are trying to prioritize some house projects and maybe at some point replace our laptop computer...

The idea of being given some lands and taking others' possessions just doesn't seem to fit reality as we know it...and so I wonder...I wonder about certain stories and parts of the Bible. I hope I'm not alone. Sometimes I wonder if we don't wonder enough about what we read from this ancient corpus of sacred words...

The challenge I believe...for Stephen Ministers...for us as pastors and ministers...for us as everyday folk who are living life and doing our best to handle the realities of life as they come...is to get a sense of the overarching themes and perspectives on life that have been preserved in these ancient and inspired words.

The psalmists...and particularly the psalm before us this morning...help us in this way.

At one level...Psalm 105 recounts the stories of Israel's past that with a first read may seem as far away from reality for us as far away as far away can be. "Who cares Brian about Israel's past." You may be saying to yourself: *I'm worried about my past. I'm concerned with the present. Our family is facing health realities that are overwhelming and that are turning life upside down... I'm trying to figure out how I'm to balance the many responsibilities I've been given... We need to pay a bill by the end of the month... or... you may be thinking...*

I've got this situation at work...at the office...and I don't know how it's going to turn out... or ...Brian...you

have no idea the realities our son or daughter is facing...we're worried about them...

Psalm 105 and any text of scripture for that matter can seem so far removed from life as we know it we may just find ourselves doing the Pavlovian thing during worship on Sunday mornings...oh we're here...we listen...we stand when we're supposed to stand and sing when we're to sing...but it's easy for us to tune out what the preacher says about the scripture because...it's just not practical...

The ancient Israelites had the lands of nations given to them and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples...

This may be the last thing we want to hear in an economic season such as we're in that makes all of us nervous about the future...

BUT...there is hope and some practical challenge for us today even from these words of this ancient hymn writer. You see...really...what psalm 105 does is recounts the history of the Israelites...

Anne reminded us last week that the name Israel means one who struggles...one who struggles with God and other humans...

Isn't this our story? Don't we struggle with God...don't we struggle with others? Just this week someone said to me, "Brian...God's abandoned me. I don't know where God is...he sure ain't around anymore!"

Truthfully...the ancient Israelites story is a story about a people who struggled through life. Oh...like any history about a people or nation or country...the stories about the Israelites in the Bible have been polished up over of the course of time...they're told in such a way to make the stories sound bigger and better than maybe they were...that's what happens with history...

But in truth...the ancients...like us...lived with daily realities of life and faith that kept folk forever struggling...trying to do their best to provide for families and friends...trying to do their best to live out a faith that was meaningful and filled with hope and promise.

Isn't this our story? Don't we try to make sense out of life and faith? Don't we attempt to do our best to provide for ourselves and for others? The Bible and our faith do not give us a formula for figuring everything out...but what the Bible and faith give us is the opportunity to be human...to be real...they give us the opportunity to give our best and to trust in the mystery of life that may just help us through to the other side of that which we're now facing...

When we're stuck...when it seems we're in a rut...when we're wondering how we'll get through...when we're down and discouraged...the psalmist offers us a clue to navigating such times and seasons...

Think about your life...look to your past...remember the good things...remember the ways you can say, "I remember when God was with me...when God provided..." While you may not want to believe in God...and this is sometimes the case...remember that God is...and speak to God...pray...give thanks... This is the psalmist's advice.

And it just may be that in this way of remembering...and praying...and giving thanks...something about the present...something about the future may just begin to come into view... There may just be a light at the end of the tunnel that begins to shine...

I remember one of the 9-11 stories that was told on news programs last week... It was the story of a group of fire fighters that were in a stair well on the fourth floor of the north tower when it collapsed. They were assisting an injured woman when all of a sudden they realized after the building caved in around them...they were trapped in what seemed like that which would become their coffin.

After hours passed...one of the fire fighters looked in darkness down toward his feet and saw a pin-hole of light through the rubble that settled beneath him. That pin hole of light became a ray of hope that kept him and the others moving forward toward their rescue...

No matter what is happening...may I invite you today to look for the pin-holes of light around you. I have to believe...that Jesus had to have seen pin-holes of light...even as he faced his darkest hours. In fact...such glimpses of light are probably what kept him going more than we'll ever know...

As we live life as individuals and family units...as we live life as a congregation...let's remember these sage-like words from psalm 105...let's remember God and give thanks for the fact that we've made it through the past...and in so doing...we may find the courage, hope and vision for the future. Amen.