

Daily Lenten Devotional
Sunday, April 20, 2025
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47—Then They Remembered



But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.
—Luke 24.1-9

How we remember is different than how we understand.

Knowledge is something we pursue, something we search and seek out.

Memory is something for which we must wait, something we invite, and something we pray will leave us.

Perhaps the greatest witness to this can be found in the four different endings of the gospels. Much effort, ink, sweat and tears, has been spent and spilled trying to understand the endings of the gospels.

In Mark the ending of the gospel is fear: "and the women ran away in fear." They were told to go Galilee, but they ran away instead. Not a very victorious easter.

In Matthew, the disciples hear the direction to return home to Galilee, they do so, and are given the great commission: go out teaching and baptizing to the ends of the earth.

In Luke, the women hear a message about what Jesus said in Galilee, but they are not instructed to go anywhere. Indeed, they all stay in Jerusalem.

In John Mary meets Jesus in the Garden and then they all return to Galilee lost and confused. Jesus shows up for breakfast and tells Peter to "feed his sheep."

In our value of accuracy and consistency and verifiability, such divergent endings to the gospels will often prompt, "one of them is true." Yet, what I have found is to trust the four memories of the easter account and to leave aside the demand to achieve certainty through knowledge. All four illumine the soul as we remember. "Then they remembered his words."

If we consider the dead as in need of our memory, if consider the past as in need of our conjuring, if we consider our acts of injustice as demanding penance, the monument, memorial and museum all satisfy that need to greater or lesser extents. There was a great need to honor and remember Washington and Grant leading to massive construction projects. The obelisk in the center of the mall in D.C. took decades to build, massive costs, and in the end was the tallest building in the world. That was not a modest effort. There was a deep need to remember Washington, for him to be remembered in the future, for his life to illumine ours. Although Grant is not as remembered nor as obvious as Washington, his "victory" was something in need of remembrance. Grant's tomb is in some ways the capstone of monumental expression, the highpoint of over 5000 statuary designs. That he was entombed as Napoleon had a great deal more to do with the form "saving the Union" had taken than who Grant was. Grant was more memory aid than memory itself.

And we should also consider that collective memory, history, changes with each generation. The compelling need to erect four statues of Daniel Webster perhaps satisfied his contemporaries, but they have not maintained the impact. The neglect of the Webster statue in Central Park, it's lackadaisical placement and complete lack of invitation to approach it, all

contest a debt and memory that has lost all value. We are neither compelled to remember or to forget him.

Webster, though, is most helpful if we consider the power of memory illumined in beauty and the grotesque, as what it is reveals in us. This is the great power of the four different easter endings. It is not that one is accurate and the others are inaccurate, one is a true account and the other are false accounts. Each has the power to illumine the world today, to cast the light of the first day upon our lives. Do we live in fear? Are we looking to the world as a beloved? Have we "let the dead bury their own dead?" Do we know what it means to feed the sheep of Jesus? The scandalous particularity of the four gospels is in a sense like the "heads at the Met." Each can sit upon the statue of the gospel account of Jesus.

The multiple and in some ways contradictory easter endings of the gospels has another power. And the power is the way we are to treat them. They are not fixed; they fix us. The difference should keep them from becoming an idol instead of an account, a memory instead of an understanding. The power to resist history as an idol is a great need today. Be it in the whitewashed version of history where there is no demand of penance to the reduction of history to nothing more than violence and shame: the need to resist one account as the only account is at the heart of American culture today. You can see it from the ivory tower theories to the parking lot vendors selling hats demanding a greatness to be remembered. Neither of these extremes satisfies what is owed, the price we are to pay.

The great lesson of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial needs to be invited again and again. The lesson: is it honest; is their healing; is their hope? The power of the design and the construction is found in answering all these questions and then inviting the next generation to do the same. Are you living an honest life; are you healing what is broken; do you have hope? To beg such questions is the cost of memory. It is the price we must ever be willing to pay.

. . . then they remembered.