

January 8, 2017

“The Sunday After – Jason Gray”

Rev. Dr. John Ross

Well, I can only imagine that you're anxious to hear some more Jason Gray. What I want to tell you is that you will. You will. And if you haven't received some kind of a word or message from God yet in this hour, I want to invite you to really listen up because, well, Jason's message, aside from his music, is really powerful and really important. What I want to do for just a couple minutes is make an invitation to all of you. I had one little story that I was going to tell, but hearing Jason just admit and confess that he was doing some things that he hadn't done and in particular because he offered that song that he hadn't sung in six years and set us up for a train wreck. That's the gift of the day already for me, that song, and did you hear the last line of it? I had never heard it before but the last line – I think the title of the song is *On the Other Side* – maybe that's the title, but I know the last line. He said, “Jesus, teach me that again.” Jesus, teach me that again.

If Jason and I had had a month to plan together, we couldn't have come up with a better serendipitous moment, a better connection between what he was singing in that line and his over-all ministry and what I want to invite you into because what I want to invite you into is to allow Jesus to teach you something again by remembering again and remembering anew. I want to invite us all to begin 2017 with the idea of what it would be to re-member, to re-member, differently than to remember something like to recall, but to re-member it. Let me unpack that a little. I think it's really important because we are apparently theological amnesiacs. That's a fancy way of saying that we forget the things that really matter in life, and we forget the things that really seem to matter to God, and that is a big problem for people of faith because as people of faith, we know that what Richard Puckett said was true when he said, “Faith begins with memory.” Everything we do, everything that we believe, who we are at our core is based on the memory of something before us, and if that's vague to you, let me remind you that we just celebrated Advent and Christmas. It's one big memory that we're pulling for – the Incarnation of God, the birth of Jesus. All faith begins with memory, but as theological amnesiacs – (I'm so glad Brady's here this morning. He's my preaching buddy. He brings emphasis at just the right time. See?)

Because we're theological amnesiacs, it's easy for us to forget, and it happens, I think, at two times in life with particular reality to us. The first time of life is when things are not going so great. When we're going through a rough patch or tough time, we tend to forget the goodness of God, the promises of God, the blessings of God in our lives, but, surprisingly, the other time when it happens is when things are really going well for us, when we're on top of the world and everything's great. It's in that moment, also, when we often forget, and it's in that moment that we need to remember.

Rustin read out passages from two voices. The first was Isaiah. Isaiah represents someone who was in a tough time, a rough patch, and he was speaking to the Israelites in about the sixth century about the destruction and the despair and the doubt among the people who had forgotten the promises of Yahweh, and he said to them, “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” In other words, “Don't forget. Remember.”

The second voice that he read was from Samuel. Samuel, on the other hand, was coming out of a really good time, a good time for the Israelites at the end of the reign of Judges, when Israel was going through a revival, and they were in repentance, which is always a good thing. They were being renewed from within. They were reclaiming land. I mean that's part of the story there, but it was a good time,

and to them, Samuel said, "Let us never forget. Thus far the Lord has helped us." In other words, even in good times, don't forget but instead remember.

Now, it's understandable to forget the goodness of God and the promises of God in the tough times like Isaiah. It's hard to remember the goodness and the love of God when we're going through diagnoses or death or divorce within any kind of relationship in our life. That is almost an understandable time for us to forget, but I want to say to you that I think it's even dangerous when we forget during the really good times. If we forget the goodness of God, if we forget the promises of God and the blessings of God when things are going really well, it's dangerous because all of a sudden we begin to think that we had something to do with the successes of our lives, that we had something to do with the blessings that have come to us when we know that all good things flow to us from God. So, when the deals and the dividends and the debates are all going our way, don't be fooled into thinking that's all about you. Instead, remember the blessings and the grace of God in the midst of that.

So, I think generally there's kind of two sorts of people in the room right now, those of you who are, like Isaiah, in a rough patch, in a tough time. I think there are also those of you who are on top of the world and feeling really good about life right now like Samuel. Which of those two are you in January of 2017? Imagine that for yourself for a moment, and by the way, there might be a third and most dangerous category of all, and that would be the indifference category, where you're just feeling sort of dead. Where ever you are in life and whatever you're experiencing right now, we want to help you re-member. We're going to re-member our lives and our faith over the next few weeks. We're going to do, as the old hymn says, we're going to raise an Ebenezer. Now, if you have no idea what it means to raise an Ebenezer, that's okay 'cause most of us don't know. We just have heard that line, and in that hymn, you know, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* - and Jason's going to sing it in a minute - there's that funny line about "raise an Ebenezer." I'm going to raise my Ebenezer. What does that mean? Well, that's Samuel. The word Ebenezer literally means stone of help, and it's what Samuel did to commemorate God's help, to co-remember, to remember God's blessing and grace. Samuel set a great big stone between the towns of Mizpah and Shen to remember, and he named that stone Ebenezer.

So, we're going to raise an Ebenezer in the next couple of months. We're going to remember what really matters out of the busyness in our lives and the distractions, good times and/or bad times. We're going to re-member our lives, which according to our author and sort of our guide through this book over the next couple of weeks, "to remember is to renew and to recommit our lives, our highest priorities in both mind and action." So, this is my invitation to all of you - to enter into this conversation these first few weeks of this New Year, to find the ways in which you need to remember, good times, bad times, indifferent. We'd all do well to remember the gifts, the blessings and the promises of God. You know, Jesus took this idea of remembering pretty seriously. In fact, it was maybe the most memorable occasion of his ministry right at the close when he was gathered with his disciples in an upper room (John goes behind the table where the bread and wine are placed), and he gave them this gift to help them re-member him, to re-member his ministry, to re-member his love and his sacrifice, to re-member the grace that was born in and through him, and we gather around this table to do the same, to re-member him.

The invitation is to all, to all to come to this table to remember, whether you're in a rough stretch or a good stretch, and maybe especially if you're feeling indifferent, come to this table and receive the gift that God has in store for you in and through this. These simple elements, these common elements of bread and cup are made uncommon in our receiving of them. So, we remember the night of betrayal

and on the eve of his death that Jesus took bread, and he blessed it, and he broke it, and he held it out to them, and he said, "Take this and eat it, all of you and do so remembering me.

(Kristen Jeide speaks.)

And in the same way after supper, Jesus took the cup saying, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink of it, remember me."

So, ministering to you in his name, I pour out this cup and give it to you.

Let us pray. O, God, we offer you this bread and cup, remembering Jesus who lived and taught, who died and rose again to reconcile the whole world to yourself. We ask you now to bless and make holy by the power of your spirit these gifts of bread and cup that we may receive your healing love made known to us in Jesus and live out that love in our lives, following and serving. In his name. Amen.