

Jesu Juva

“Words to Remember”

Text: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:27-38; Romans 5:1-11

**G**race, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Some words you do not soon forget.

The first time your future spouse says *I love you*. Or when they spoke their wedding vow to you. The first word your child utters. A cutting remark that really hurt. A word of encouragement when you needed it most.

Abram received such a word from God, that he would have a son. He remembered that word, though he seems to have begun to doubt it. It was taking so long. So many years had passed and still he had no son. But just as there are some words that we do not soon forget, so for God, there are words HE does not forget: His promises. We may get impatient, we may wonder and doubt, they may take a long time to fulfill, but fulfilled they will be.

So today we heard God repeat His promise to Abram; He had not forgotten. In fact, though it had not yet happened on earth, it had happened already as far as God was concerned. **For**, He says, ***I have made you the father of a multitude of nations***. Past tense. Done. Even though this son of the promise had not yet been born.

We heard another such word today, a word not soon forgotten, spoken to Peter. When Jesus said to him, ***Get behind me, Satan!*** How that word must have stung Peter. How it must have echoed around in his head for some time after that. How he must have kicked himself and wished he could take back what he said. And then not too long after that, when Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times . . . Think those words came back to haunt him? Yes, Jesus was right. I am a lousy friend. I am evil. I am worthless. I am nothing.

Yes Peter, Jesus was right. *So listen to Him!* He said that this **MUST** happen - this suffering, rejection, and death. You know what that means? That even if you did all the right things, and said everything right, Peter, *Jesus still would have been crucified*. Even if you had confessed Jesus in the courtyard of the High Priest that night and were arrested for it - *Jesus still would have been crucified*. Even if when you drew your sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and had successfully warded off all those soldiers and guards single-handedly and were awarded the medal of honor - *Jesus still would have been crucified*. This **MUST** be, Jesus said. Because God had promised. And He does not forget. He had promised to send a Saviour, a son of Abraham. He had promised that He would lay your sins on this

Saviour, that He would be stricken, smitten and afflicted for you, and that He would be crushed for your iniquities. But also this: that by those wounds, you would be healed (Isaiah 53:4-6), Peter. Those were words from the Old Testament that Peter should have known, should have remembered, but didn't. But God did. And He was now fulfilling them. In Jesus.

But isn't that the way of it? There are words you do not soon forget, but they're oftentimes not the words we want to remember! It's the words we wish would get out of our heads, the words we don't want up there, that keep coming back, that we can't seem to get rid of. Satan likes to keep reminding us of those words. Those words that hurt, so we'll hate and plot revenge. Those words that remind us of our failures, that make us ashamed, so that we'll despair and think ourselves unworthy of God.

But as with Peter, there are other words for us, too. Like we heard today in the reading from Romans: *that God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. That is, Jesus didn't die for you because you are good or worthy, but because you're not. Because you need to hear these words: *I forgive you all your sins*. All that you're ashamed of, all your failures and shortcomings, all your rebellion and mistakes, all of it - I forgive. Those are words we should not soon forget! But how often we do. So they are spoken to you, *given* to you, here, every week. To remind you. To sink them into your brain and your heart. To raise you to a new life to live again this week.

For that ultimately is why, as Jesus said, *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again*. Jesus had to die because the wages of your sin is death. So He died your death. And then He rose that just as He died your death with you, you would rise with Him in His resurrection. That you not live a life full of regrets, or shame, or despair, or shouldas, wouldas, and couldas, but live a new life. And so this too - He pours the Holy Spirit into your heart. To strengthen you, to keep you, and to holy you. To remind you of the words of Jesus. That His words be ones you do not soon forget. His words of promise and forgiveness and life.

And the cross was the means God used to accomplish all this for you. There was no other way. Only through the cross of Christ, Paul says, is there justification, reconciliation, peace, and joy.

And yes, **the cross also IS** the means God uses to accomplish this for you. It both WAS and IS. That's what Jesus goes on to say. For not only does He say this about His own cross, **but yours, too**. So after speaking with His disciples about the necessity of His own crucifixion, He calls the whole crowd to Him and says to them: *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. The cross MUST be for Jesus and it MUST be for you, too.

Which means - like with Peter - that even if you do all the right things, *you will still have the*

*cross in your life.* Even if you say all the right things, *you will still have the cross in your life.* Even if you are a Christian of Christians, the most faithful, the most steadfast, the most dedicated, in Church every week, never missing a service or a Bible Study, giving generously, praying always, fasting regularly, serving others, humble, someone no one - Christian or non-Christian - has anything bad to say about at all . . . *still you will have the cross in your life.* It MUST be for Jesus and it MUST be for you. **Because the cross is God's means of help and strength.**

*Whaaaaaat?*

It's true. **The cross is God's means of help and strength.** Without the cross in your life, you will rely on yourself and what you are able to do and accomplish and so you will be lost. ***For whoever would save his life*** - whoever would do it himself - ***will lose it***, Jesus said. Even if you have really good intentions.

So to ***take up your cross*** means to not rely on yourself; to not rely on what you can do and accomplish; to not rely on human help, thinking, wisdom, or strength, but **to find your life in the death and resurrection of Jesus alone.** You might be successful. Many people are. *But that is not the source of your life.* You might be a Christian of Christians. *But that is not the source of your life.* Only Jesus is. And His words of promise. When you have those, then whether you have much or little, are successful or not, have the life you always dreamed of or one a bit different, you have what nothing in this world can give OR take away: **a life that will not end.**

Now, it is true that the cross doesn't look or feel like that! When Peter and the others looked at the cross and saw Jesus hanging on it, they didn't see life - they saw death! And when you bear the cross, it doesn't feel good! Enduring the sins of others, the attacks and assaults of satan, the nails and spears of the world, hurt. It seems like your life is being taken away! And if you're like me, you'd rather not bear those things. We pray for them to go away. Paul did. Uh, I'd like one of those easy lives, please! With no hard decisions, no persecution, no times when it is difficult to confess my faith.

But at just a such time, the Lord said to Paul: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). **For the weakness of the cross reveals the power of God.** The power of His love for you. That He would do that for you. While you were still weak. While you were still sinners. While you were an enemy.

And the cross in your life is the same. The Lord gives you the cross not to hurt you but to help you. Not to punish you but to save you. That you rely not on yourself, but on Him. That you rely on His strength, not your own. That not your wisdom but His, be your guide. To put your old, sinful man down, and raise up a new man. To ***set your mind on the things of God.*** To set your minds of the Word of God.

As for Peter, I would say this was another word he would not soon forget! ***Get behind me,***

***Satan!*** was a tough word. Hearing of Jesus' cross, another. But having to bear the cross ourselves as well? I'm sure he did not understand. *Yet*. But he would. And, in fact, this new life he was given changed him from a man who was afraid to even say he knew Jesus to one who bore a cross quite literally and was crucified himself because he would not deny Jesus.

We need that work of Jesus in our lives as well. That life-giving work, even though it may, at times, feel like our lives are being taken away, or that Jesus has forgotten or forsaken us. But He has not. He does not forget His Word. Like, the word He spoke to you in your baptism when He made you His child. Like, the word of forgiveness that He speaks to you. He does not forget these, or you. He is saving you. By the cross He bore for you. By the cross He gives to you.

So it really is true, that **the cross is God's means of help and strength**. And that help and strength is here for you now. For the challenges you are facing. For your doubts and fears. For your wrong decisions and regrets. For the words and deeds you wish you could take back. For the accusations of satan still echoing around your head. Jesus says: *Take and eat and drink; My Body, My Blood, for you*. For your forgiveness. For new life and strength and hope. Which means that even though you may not soon forget your sins and failures and regrets, Jesus remembers them no more (Jeremiah 31:34). He doesn't *forget* them - He *wiped them out*. Which means they're not there anymore. There's nothing to forget! And they're not coming back. They got buried with Jesus in the tomb. And there they stayed when Jesus rose without them, victorious over them. He rose alive. They stayed dead.

Jesus **MUST** do this, Peter. For you. Jesus **MUST** do this, Christian. For you. And it is what He wants to do. For you. For all people. No matter who you are or what you have done. His love is greater than your shame, His forgiveness is greater than your sin, and His life is greater than your death. And these gifts are here, for you.

Hear these words. Rejoice in them. And may they be the words you *never* forget. For Jesus never forgets them. For He never forgets you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.