

“The Healing of Memories”

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Ecclesiastes 1: 1-9 & Revelation 21: 1-7

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*"Vanity of vanities says the preacher, all is vanity.
A generation goes and a generation comes,
but the earth remains the same.
What has been is what will be
And there is nothing new under the sun"*

Contrast this verse from the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament with one from the book of Revelation in the New –

"Behold I make all things new!"

In 3 days' time we will see the start of a New Year. So, do you plan to make a New Year's resolution this year? If so, do you think that this year you will keep it? A remarkably high percent of Canadians do engage in this annual ritual, year after year. Why on earth do we do it? There is a sense at the beginning of a new year that we haven't messed things up yet. The New Year is pristine. We haven't blotted our copybook yet, and maybe this time, maybe this year, we can get our act together and do things right. The strange thing is that, even as we do it, part of us thinks nothing is going to change – just as the book of Ecclesiastes says. And yet another part of us fervently hopes that at least some things will.

So, what is it that prevents us from changing, and keeping the promises we make to ourselves? I want to look at a part of this puzzle this morning. It seems to me that a large part of what prevents us from making the most of a new beginning is the mental and emotional baggage we carry with us from the past.



As many of you know, Wendy and I lived in Zambia, in Central Africa, for four years. In fact that is where your minister Pastor Kim was born. She was a little Zambian.

Now, the Zambians have a wonderful word for all our burdens, physical, emotional, personal – the burdens we keep carrying, and either cannot or will not set down. There is no

English equivalent. The word is Katundu.

It's a word Wendy and I still use. The suitcases you put into your car or carry on a flight is your katundu. But the word means far more. All the emotional hurts, struggles, and memories that we carry from the past with us into the present — that too is katundu. The problem is that it is very hard to move on until you have in some manner dealt with your past emotional katundu. King Solomon was right - "What has been is what will be, and there is nothing new under the sun."

It's a bit like a Charlie Brown cartoon strip I remember. Charlie is sitting in front of the booth that says 'Psychiatric Help - 5 cents'. Lucy is sitting behind the booth. Charlie asks Lucy why he dreams. Lucy says that dreams are the brain's way of trying to sort things out so that we see ourselves as we really are. Charlie Brown shakes his head and says, "Even my brain is against me!"

Actually, Lucy was right. When we try to repress memories we don't like, our unconscious mind leads us to dream about them.



Albert Camus was a famous French philosopher — an Existentialist.

Existentialism is a philosophy that takes as its starting point the experience of ordinary human beings — not what we think, but the experiences and feelings people have.

Existentialism was at its height in the Post War years – the 1940's -1950's. That was when I read about it in my Philosophy courses in University.

But this story, (which to be honest I have been unable to verify) is about an event that happened in Camus' life. The story's beginnings go back to the late 1800's when a very beautiful young woman drowned in the River Seine that flows through the center of Paris. It was recorded as a suicide. Her photo was widely circulated in all the newspapers. It became quite a sensation. Camus felt that she was very beautiful and had everything to live for. It was a view shared by almost everyone in France. Many years after she died, Camus and a few friends were standing at the very spot by the river where it had happened. According to his friends, Camus began to sob and cried out, "O young woman, please come back and do it over – so that I might be able to save both of us!"

What exactly was tormenting Camus? We do not know. But something was. He needed to be rescued from some very painful memory.

The causes of painful memories are legion. The most common are the breakup and betrayal of a relationship. Families often quarrel over many things, but especially over a will. There are any number of family members who are not on speaking terms with each other and have not been for years.

In one of my early churches there were two sisters who came to church regularly — every Sunday. One sat up in the balcony, and the other down below. They both sang hymns about faith, love, and forgiveness – but neither would speak to the other. When I tried to mediate, *they both got mad at me!*

There are so many other reasons for hurtful memories. Experiencing a deep and painful loss; a guilty conscience – such as trying to ignore a past lie that you told; any number of things can lead to hurtful memories

The question is, how do you heal a memory? Many people, large numbers actually, spend hours in therapy sessions. And that is never a bad thing. It often helps. But this morning I want like to offer three suggestions that come from scripture. They are: repentance, confession, & restitution.

First, repentance. If there is an unresolved issue in your past that you are feeling guilty about – or perhaps don't but ought to – then the first thing you have do is own up to it. Please note this is not to suggest that you should take on false guilt. It is not to suggest that the other party involved may not be as much or even more responsible than you were for whatever happened. It is only to say that we must honestly and realistically assess our own part in any hurtful event and be able to admit our part. In James 5:16 we read, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, and this will heal you.” It is not just Christianity either. The fifth Step in AA asks us to do the very same.

The Bible talks about grace. It is love we do not deserve. Grace is not God's gift for getting things right ... it's for when we get things wrong. That's when grace comes in. The simple truth is we cannot heal the things we try to hide. They remain in control of us – and they keep hurting us, and those around us, particularly the ones we love. Only God's forgiving grace can set us free.

The second step is confession. But to whom do you confess? To whom can you talk with about past hurts and shames? Sometimes it is enough just to do it between yourself and God in a time of prayer – likely many prayer times. But very often that is not enough. You need to tell your story to another person — your minister, a trusted friend, a counsellor – someone. (A word of caution: choose wisely before you share deep personal hurts with another. Is the person you are going to talk to able to keep a confidence and does he/she have the kind of wisdom that might help you?) The right person won't necessarily just sympathize with you. He or she might challenge you. And that may be just what you need.

Back in the 1980's I was part of a Christian group called Cursillo. It is a Spanish word that means a Short Course. It was a renewal movement in the Christian faith that began in the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. It proved to be such a powerful method to go deeper into Christian faith that it soon spread everywhere. Anglicans and Protestants were soon using it. In the

Cursillo movement, being "in colours" is to be in God's grace. For that reason, Cursillo members (cursillistas) would greet each other by saying "*Des Colores*" (in Colours).

We met monthly, and I have never forgotten one evening at Cursillo when a woman shared her story. She described being set free from a deep anger she had nursed towards God for years over the death of her young child. The way she shared her story at that meeting was one of the most moving and one of the most healing moments that I have ever been part of. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room.

My point is a simple. Talking; sharing openly, is good for the soul. We need to speak of the things that have hurt us deeply; the things of which we are ashamed; and admit them to God, and to others. The act of confessing – of sharing – leads to a healing release that opens the way to healing.

Restitution, the third step, takes us further. If there is something we can do to put right a bad situation, then we need to do it. A woman I know phoned her sister. They had been at war for years – would not talk to each other. She phoned her sister and asked for forgiveness for everything that she had said or done that had hurt her.

Her sister was stunned – didn't know what to say – muttered something incoherent and hung up. That phone call took an enormous act of courage, and in the end it worked. It took time, but it was the beginning of healing. The reason why it worked was that the woman sought forgiveness from her sister. That is the way we gain forgiveness for ourselves — by asking it of others. If she had phoned and said "My dear sister, I forgive you for everything you have said and done that has hurt me," it would only have made the whole thing worse. She didn't do that. Even though it was impossible to know who had started the quarrel, or who was in the wrong, or who had said the worst things – she didn't go there. She simply sought forgiveness for herself. And that's why it worked.

The final step in the healing of memories is saying goodbye to them. Once you have made whatever confession, repentance and restitution you can, then you commit that hurtful memory into God's hands — and say goodbye to it. You give the pain into God's hands, and just refuse to take it back! It can be done in Church, always a very good place to do it. It can be done in your home, or in your car, but wherever, it needs to be done. Bad memories need to be released in order to set you free.

The final step is what I call redemptive healing. It is the opening of yourself to the healing power of God's Spirit. In John 14, Jesus promised never to leave us alone. He promised to leave us the peace of His Spirit. In a very real way, it is when we open ourselves to Christ's Spirit that we become redeemed. In ancient times a redeemer was a person who literally bought you

out of debt. If you were languishing in a debtor's prison, you desperately needed a redeemer. And if a friend came and paid your debt for you – redeemed you – you were a very fortunate person, and would love that friend forever.

This is what Jesus does. He literally buys us back from our own follies, and our own sins, our own hurts and our own pits of despair! Carl Jung the famous psychoanalyst once said that in his thirty years of his practice he had not seen a single patient whose problem wasn't, in the last resort, in the area of "religion." By religion Jung meant a sense of being whole, of being connected – being one with God and one with others. It included a sense of gentleness and reverence for life. Jung was profoundly right. Any new beginning is essentially a religious quest, because it has to do with life. This is exactly what the peace of Christ gives to those who seek him.

The Apostle Paul once said: "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

This is my wish for you in 2020. In this year to come, forget what lies behind, and move on toward the beautiful future that lies ahead by the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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