

## A Holy Paradox

Throughout the Bible, we find this paradox that weaves all the way through Scripture. On the one hand, God continues to call the people to remember what God has done in the past and to remember those who have come before them, and on the other hand, God tells the people that the Spirit is about to do a new thing. And while the Bible was written by many different authors who didn't always agree with each other, this paradox was not a tension between the traditionalists – those who wanted to do things like they had been done – and the progressives – those who wanted to usher in a new way. Rather, in Scripture, whenever God asked the people to remember their past, it was never in the context of trying to hold on to what was. It was always in the context of God calling the people to something new: a new journey, a new land, a new covenant, a new commandment. The call to remember was a call to trust – that just as God was found to be faithful to our spiritual ancestors when they were called to set out, so too will God be faithful to us. We remember the past, not so we can go back to it, but so we can find the courage to face the future.

And often when the biblical writers reminded the people of this paradox between remembering and doing something new, it was when the people found themselves in a time of uncertainty – an old world was passing away but the new one hadn't quite been birthed yet.

It was the time of the people wondering in the wilderness. They had left slavery but not made it to the promised land.

It was when the exiles returned from Babylon but the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins.

It was Jesus proclaiming that the kingdom of God had arrived in one breath and, in the very next, telling his disciples he would soon die.

It was the disciples seeing the risen Christ but completely overwhelmed with their call to continue the work Jesus started.

It was the early church leaders believing that Christ was the Savior for the whole world but struggling to live into the full ramifications of including everyone – Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave or free.

Time and again, God's people find themselves living in the in-between times. I would argue we're living in one of those times right now:

We live in a time where there's a great struggle between those who want to ensure that historically marginalized groups have more freedom, more justice, more rights than ever before and those who want to take us back 50 or 100 or 150 years.

We live in a time of unprecedented technology and a time where the natural world's stern sense of justice continues to show us the ramifications of human action with floods and droughts and storms and fires that will only worsen as the world's climate continues to change.

We live in a time where literally every single person with a social media account has a voice and a time with cyber bullying and rampant misinformation.

We live in a time where we have to decide as a people if we will continue to live into our democratic ideals or devolve into autocracy and oligarchy.

And on a much more local level, our two churches also find ourselves living in one of those in between times. We both have such a rich history. And yet we believe God is calling us to something greater than either of us can do on our own.

We live in a time of uncertainty and anxiety, a time of excitement and a time of trepidation, a time of hope and a time of wondering if the hope we have to offer is strong enough for what we may have to face. So as we journey into the future, let's remember.

Let's remember that in the Civil War, the Ladies Aid Society completely ran East Church, ensuring that the church not only survived but flourished while the men were fighting to ensure all people could be free. Right now, I don't know what lies ahead, but my guess is that many of our Haitian siblings are terrified. As we are called to offer sanctuary against forces that want to demean and harm them, let's remember those heroic women who stood in the gap while our nation fought over who we would be.

As members of the LGBTQ community and especially our trans siblings once again find themselves political punching bags in the pursuit of power and our words of love and affirmation and welcome and support mean more now than ever, let's remember that our two churches made the decision more than a decade ago to be open and affirming. We lost members. We lost givers. But we know today that it was worth it because every single person is a child of God and deserves to be treated as such.

When global tragedies like 9/11 or COVID tempt us to circle the wagons let's remember those brave First Church people who chose to build the Centre school after the stock market collapsed in the wake of 9/11. Let's remember that both of our churches decided to reimagine who we were after the pandemic. We claimed a bold new vision of being a church where everyone could belong, grow, and engage and a bold new venture that we are better together.

You see friends, in times of uncertainty or times of transition, the act of remembering is the first act God calls us to do. Because when we remember, we realize that we are not the first people to face hard time, we are not the first people that God called out into the unknown, and we are not the first people who have leaned on all those who have come before them so that they might build something new, something that will impact those who will come after.

Remembering is why we observe All Saints Sunday each year. It's a chance for us to be intentional to honor all those who have loved us and who we loved, who we love still. But it's more than that. It's a time for us to recognize that though they may not still be with us, the impact they have on who we are and on who we are becoming never dies.