

Do This in Remembrance of Me

There are three things that I can't remember, the old Professor said, "I can't remember names, I can't remember faces and...hmm, let's see, well I guess, I can't remember the other thing I can't remember."

The human brain is a truly remarkable organ. Scientists say that we only use a small percentage of our brain's capacity and yet we have the capacity to remember.

But we all face the problem of remembering – or, put differently, our tendency to forget. We have so many things to remember these days; modern media bombards our brains with all kinds of facts and claims – I would think a lot of it irrelevant; the development of mobile phones and their use as a small computer, only complicates things further.

So many things to remember, all our different PINs and passwords; we live in a sea of memory. We are on call constantly with our phones, some of us will sleep with them; we become like firefighters at the end of a phone, and it's easy for our minds to get totally cluttered.

What things should we remember and what things should we forget?

In early 1606 an Act was passed, designating 5 November as a date of thanksgiving, with bonfires and fireworks settled upon as a suitably fitting commemoration.

And this tradition of remembering Guy Fawkes' actions has been remembered through the lighting of bonfires and firework displays ever since.

In 1626, the famous poet John Milton wrote a poem in Cambridge, which is still remembered today.

*Remember, remember, the 5th of November,
Gunpowder, treason and plot.*

I see no reason

Why gunpowder treason

Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, 'twas his intent

To blow up the King and the Parliament

Three score barrels of powder below

*Poor old England to overthrow
 By God's providence he was catch'd
 With a dark lantern and burning match
 Holler boys, holler boys, let the bells ring
 Holler boys, holler boys
 God save the King!*

The poem commemorates the anniversary of the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a small group of Catholic plotters threatened to change the course of history.

And so a national event of remembering became important so that this act of treason would remain in the consciousness of the country.

Next Sunday we have our annual service of remembering, as we gather to remember those who have sacrificed their lives in the wars of the past.

Remembering is an important biblical theme, going back to the days of Joshua, as he crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land.

Here we see thousands of years ago, the issue of whose land in the Middle East.

Joshua erected 12 stones at Gilgal, on the other side of the Jordan, so that future generations would remember what had happened there. This was a memory that they were to engrave on their minds and a memory that would be passed on from generation to generation.

⁶ “To serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

Remembering this event would reaffirm in their minds that God was on their side; the warrior God who made it possible for them to cross the Jordan; who rolled back the waters and made it possible for them to enter the land.

Each time they visited the 12 stones, they would remember and give thanks, and this would give them encouragement in times of difficulty and be a reference point for them as they went forward.

Remembering is vitally important for our Christian faith. What should we remember, that will help us on our journey?

Of prime importance for Christians is the atoning death of Jesus Christ. The cross marks the crucial event, the historical watershed, that brought human salvation. Like Joshua, a thousand years earlier, Jesus took great pains to ensure that his followers remembered his death. There is more about the last weeks of Jesus' death and his resurrection in the gospels than any other part of his life.

At the Last Supper he declared, "This is my body given to you." But he adds, "Do this in remembrance of me." Thereby instituting what we are doing this morning in our communion service: we are remembering the death and resurrection of our Lord.

In 1707 Isaac Watts, the father of modern Christian hymnody wrote the beautiful hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.

Watts, whose father was a pastor, was burdened as a young boy that the church only sang psalms during their worship times.

As wonderful as they were, the psalms did not tell the story of God's salvation through Christ's life, the cross, His death and resurrection.

They did not celebrate the grace, the mercy, the atonement, or the second coming of Christ, so Isaac Watts started writing hymns for their church's worship services. As you can imagine, this stirred up great controversy, but this hymn (along with the other 750 he wrote) gave Christians of Watt's Day (and ours) a way to express a deeply personal gratitude to our Saviour. It is considered one of the finest hymns ever written. It is a hymn that helps us to remember.

The first verse helps us to focus on Jesus.

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died.

On his final night; on the eve of his death; Jesus took bread and wine, and he blessed them and he said do this in remembrance of me.

What is it that Jesus wants us to remember?

Well, the bread and wine represent his sacrifice. His coming into this world was for sinners like you and me. He came to bring us into a living relationship with God by bringing forgiveness and reconciliation.

Watts catches this superbly well in the third verse,

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

Watts brings us to the foot of the cross, and he makes us lift up our heads, and see the suffering that Jesus endured for us, it helps us to remember.

I especially love the last verse: *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Jesus' amazing love changes our lives!

And when we catch something of what Jesus has done for us, we cannot but say with Watts,

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

Each word, each line of his hymn, is highly emotionally charged as he catches superbly well what Jesus has done for us and our response which he concludes his hymn with,

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Let us now remember what Jesus has done for us, as we sing together,
When I survey the wondrous cross...