

**Preacher:** Ruth Preston Schilk

**Date:** Nov. 22, 2009

**Scripture:** Isaiah 25:1-10a

**Sermon:** *Remembering the Future: a Service of Remembrance and a Celebration of Communion*

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When I was a young child, I loved to be the one who officially turned up the new calendar page at the start of a new month. We had a few calendars spread around the house, the kind where the month is torn off to show the next month below it. But we had only one calendar, (the one that hung on the wall in the kitchen near the telephone) that was big and whose pages were turned *up*, not torn *off*. Its specialness to me may have had to do with its pictures of far-away people and places. Perhaps on a **deeper** level though, knowing that at the end of the year I could still **hold all** of those pages (pictures, dates, a whole year) in my hands – and that none of them was lost– perhaps I knew that *this* was in some way both a gift and a mystery.

Today is the Sunday where **the church** is poised not only to turn its calendar page in readiness for the new season of Advent, but to begin a new church-calendar year. “Each season encourages something in us and from us. Some seasons of the church and scriptures call us to a listening quietness, others to celebration, and still others to working in intentional ways.

**Advent** is a season of expectation

**Christmas** is a season of celebration

**Epiphany**, a season of illumination

**Lent**, a season of listening

**Holy Week**, is a time to remember

**Easter** is a season of ‘halleluiahs’ and the

**Season after Pentecost** becomes a season of intentional living in *our churches, in our families, in love, in justice and mercy, and in praise and gratitude*” [from “The Story-Formed Calendar” by Tara Malouf in *Mustard Seed Associates* e-newsletter,

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In a sense, we pause today holding both the gift and the mystery of the year and years passed even as we anticipate the future God plans for us.

### **Our Past**

Sometimes we are so focussed on the present or what is upcoming, we don't make time to remember or even get to know the past because there's always one more school assignment to work on, the next meal to plan and prepare, another challenge to overcome....

Sometimes we **don't want to** remember the past. Perhaps there is too much pain there, or a looming regret, or a fearful reminder. So we shrug our shoulders and say, "Gotta move on," and chide ourselves, "Can't drive while looking in the rear view mirror so much."

### **Our Future**

On the other hand, for some people, thinking about the **future** has its challenges. It's hard if one is lonely, frail, or poor to anticipate continuing in those circumstances for the foreseeable future. Still others who may **have** every physical and economic need **met** may question "Is this all there is?"

We don't need to be historians and genealogists to fan into flame a personal interest in the past, nor do we need to be stock brokers or farmers to have an investment in knowing the future. Because of **God's** presence and actions in the past, and because of **God's** plans for our future – these are reasons enough to straddle the present with confidence and open wide our hands and lives to receive God's gift and mystery of both past and future.

### **God's Past**

The writer in Isaiah 25, is excited to reflect on the past, because by doing so, he sees the wonderful things the LORD has done, "plans formed long ago with perfect faithfulness," verse one says. Isn't that

often how we see God's faithful plans for *our* lives too. Often it takes enough time and distance to see the trail of footsteps beside ours-- or as the poem *Footprints* reminds us -- even the *one* set of footprints where Jesus has carried us. God cares for us and especially for the vulnerable. This is a theme in scripture that flows from one end to the other. Whether it is the poor, the widows, the children, the stranger in the land, they hold a **special** place in God's heart.

In a sense, **all** of us, (by the fact that we are human) are vulnerable. Verses 2 and 3 refer to a city that has fallen, not a **specific** city, but more likely this is a reference to the vulnerability of people in general [John F.A. Sawyer, *The Daily Study Bible Series*, Vo. 1, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1984), p. 212]. We know that despite scientific advances and better nutrition that permits us to live **longer**, we cannot and will not live **forever**.

Yet, we need not despair. We cannot live forever, but we can live eternally. There is a difference. To live forever, would be to live in this same world, in our same body, with the same needs, with relationships that still struggle and even decay. We might be living, but would we be truly 'alive'?

## **God's Future**

To have eternal life means to have died to sin and risen to new life, alive in Christ. As Christ-believers and followers, we enter eternal life at the time of our physical death as we most fully are at home with the Lord. "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in [our body] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). The apostle Paul also makes clear: "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence" (2 Cor. 4:14).

God also offers us eternal life **already**, right now in Christ -- in

life *this* side of heaven. When Martha went to Jesus after her brother Lazarus died, Jesus told her that *He* himself is the resurrection and the life. ‘Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die’ (John 11:25-26).

The gospel of John also records Jesus declaring: “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

And yet, there is something about eternal life this side of heaven that is awaiting **completion**, whose fulfilment awaits the future.

Returning to the Isaiah 25 passage, verses 6-8 paint a vision of what ‘heaven on earth’ would look like. In the age that is to come, death will be replaced with life, sorrow with joy, as at a feast of unimaginable proportions, a grand feast for all people. Death, the great swallower, will be swallowed up and all tears of sorrow wiped away! People and nations that one could never imagine being in the same room together let-alone **eating** together--will feast at a lavish banquet.

And it will all be the LORD’s doing, and according to God’s calendar. But our participation is needed! God wants us at the table. God wants us to say ‘yes’ to Jesus. And God wants us to pass the invitation along. God’s desire is that everyone accepts his invitation to “come and dine” **Unlike** in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 22, of the king inviting guests to the wedding banquet of his son, where those initially invited responded with excuses: I’ve just got married; can’t come now. I’ve bought property; I can’t come now -- **unlike** that story, *now is* the time to say ‘Yes, I’ll join you.’ Not: “I’ll think about it later.” Not: “Yah, Jesus is **one** of the people I believe in.” There is only **one** capital ‘G’ God –Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Saying ‘yes’ to Jesus is a personal decision, but celebrated in a public way through baptism. Those of us who have made this public profession of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, remember and re-affirm that commitment when we receive communion together.

We especially reflect today on eternal communion with our Lord -- being **most** fully in his presence whether that be at our death or when Christ returns. As we receive these signs of his life, death, and resurrection, let us anticipate the **heavenly** banquet, gathering around with all who gladly rejoice in his salvation.

May this be so. Amen.

**Let us pray:**

Loving God,

You draw us to yourself.

Help us to run toward you.

We pray for those who have not yet said ‘yes’ to Jesus -- that they may with the nudge of the Holy Spirit, open the mouths of their heart now and accept his invitation to discipleship and eternal life in him.

Knowing all too well that earthly things don’t last forever, we joyfully receive your salvation. Amen.