

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
December 28 & 29, 2013
Dan Anderson
Remember Your Creator
Ecclesiastes 12:1-5**

Last week I drove to the office and when I got here, I realized I did not have my cell phone with me. When I got a break, I headed home to get my phone, only to discover that it was in a different pocket of my coat and it had been with me all along. Has that ever happened to any of you? A few years ago my wife and I were sitting on a bench by Lake Minnetonka along the Regional Trail. Two couples were walking toward us on the trail and they came over to say *hello*. One couple I remembered from the church I had served in Minnetonka for a number of years, but I had no idea who the other couple was until they reminded me that I had performed their wedding. After they left, I told my wife, "I don't remember ever seeing them before." For the life of me, I could not remember any details about them or their wedding. Anything like that ever happened to you?

The story is told of an older woman who was pulled over for speeding, probably on Highway 100 or 62 by our trusty Edina folks. When the police officer came around and asked, "Why were you going so fast?" the man in the passenger seat said, "Well, young man, we were speeding to get to the place we are going before we *forget* where we're going." Do you ever have trouble remembering?

Our Scripture lesson today begins with the word *Remember*. One definition of *remember* is to recall by an act or effort of memory. Sometimes it seems to me that the more effort I exert to remember something, the more elusive that something becomes. Another definition of the word *remember* is this: to keep in mind for attention or consideration. This is more than just a mental exercise of remembering *about* something. This is about *acting* on remembering. I can intellectually remember that if I eat too many snacks and sweets, I will gain weight. I can remember until the cows come home and still choose to open another bag of chips or buy another maple-covered Long John at Cub. The kind of remembering mentioned in Ecclesiastes 12 is to remember and to take action. Solomon tells us,

1 Remember your Creator

Remember and value and cherish and live in relationship with your Creator. Remember that God is God and we are the creatures. This is an intentional act of remembering, an intentional act of committing myself and my life to the Creator, to let God be God, and to live my life as the creature.

The children of Israel often had trouble remembering that God is God. Sometimes they wanted to take the place of God. They wanted to do their own thing and often they got in trouble. Time and time again, they were beaten down by their enemies, only to call out to God once again.

God gave them tangible reminders so that they would remember the distinction between the Creator and the creature. One example is found in the Book of Joshua, chapter 4. The people were moving into the new land, the Promised Land, and they came to the Jordan River. They wondered how they could get across. God caused the flow of the river to stop so the people could walk to the other side on dry land. Joshua was then told to create a memorial altar.

1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to [go back into the river and] take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan . . . and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

God told them to bring the stones to the shoreline and build an altar. He said,

6 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.

"Tell them that God met us here."

These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

This was to be an altar for them to remember their Creator. Several years ago my family and I attended a special service in Des Moines, Iowa. Right out of seminary, I was the pastor of a church on the western side of Des Moines. After we moved to Minnesota, that church continued to thrive and outgrew its old building. When they were ready to move into a newly built facility, a special ceremony of commemoration was planned at the old location. At the close of the service, we were all invited to come to the Communion Table in the front of the church and pick up a brick from the old building. It was to be a tangible reminder of how God had met us and changed us through the ministry of that congregation, and it was meant to encourage us as we continued to walk with our God.

"In the future, when your children ask you, 'What does this brick mean?' tell them that God met us here. Let it be a reminder to help you remember that God is God, and God does things that we cannot even begin to imagine." Solomon writes, "Remember your Creator." Get that relationship right. *Remember your Creator. Let God be God, the leader, and you and me be the followers.* Some people carry a little cross in their pocket or purse to help them remember their relationship with God. There is a poem that often comes with a cross and it goes like this.

A Cross in My Pocket by Mrs. Verna Mae Thomas.

I carry a cross in my pocket
A simple reminder to me
Of the fact that I am a Christian
No matter where I may be.

This little cross is not magic,
Nor is it a good luck charm
It isn't meant to protect me
From every physical harm.

It's not for identification
For all the world to see
It's simply an understanding
Between my Savior and me

When I put my hand in my pocket
To bring out a coin or a key
The cross is there to remind me
Of the price He paid for me

So, I carry a cross in my pocket
Reminding no one but me
That Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life
If only I'll let Him be.

Remember!

1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth,

Why is it so important to remember, to get this relationship right? Solomon says we are to remember because our days are short, and the sad days are coming. The days of youth are soon spent and increasing age brings inevitable decline.

1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come

Remember your Creator before the sad days come. Solomon goes on to delineate the progression of decline, and it's not all that pleasant. I'm going to ask you to look at the text with me. It will be on the screen or it's in your Bibles on page 1,007.

1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"-- 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark ,

Remember your Creator before cataracts and macular degeneration and glaucoma rob you of your sight. When I was a boy, I was so proud when my Grandma would ask me, "Danny, could you help me? Could you thread the needle for me?" Every time I got the thread through the needle the first time I tried, and now I can't see the hole clearly even when I'm wearing my glasses!

Remember your Creator . . . before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

When we grow old, it seems like one ailment seems to follow another. When my older friends get together and talk about their physical illnesses, we call this an organ recital, not the same as a piano recital. We recover from hip surgery and the knee goes out. We recover from knee surgery and we get a staph infection. After the rain, it seems like there is another storm looming on the horizon. *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the storms come one after another.*

3 when the keepers of the house tremble,

The keepers of the house are the hands and the legs which may begin to tremble with old age or with Parkinson's Disease or neuropathy or simply the decline of aging.

and the strong men stoop,

When I was younger, I could toss a bale of hay up into a wagon (I never did but I could have), and now when I shovel snow, I'm laid low for three days afterwards. *And the strong men stoop* because the back is no longer strong and we lean over our walkers and our canes because of our aging bodies.

when the grinders cease because they are few,

Teeth, my friends. Before my mom died, she had no teeth of her own. *Remember your Creator.*

and those looking through the windows grow dim;

The loss of sight.

4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades;

Part of this is about the loss of hearing but more is about withdrawal from everyday living, from engaging in commerce when business transactions are made, when the grinders are no longer working, when the mills are going and you are not a part of it. You are no longer involved in the important decisions of commerce and life. The doors are closed. You are trapped indoors with fleeting health, no longer a part of the business and the busyness of life.

when people rise up at the sound of birds,

The least little sound. Sleep is interrupted by the smallest of things. Last April I spent four nights in a hotel room with my 90-year-old dad. He would wake up at the slightest interruption. Every 45 minutes, all night long, he would drag himself out of bed and to the bathroom and then back into the bed. The next morning I couldn't drag myself out of bed, I was so tired. The slightest little thing will interrupt the sleep. When my brother-in-law asks my dad, "How do you sleep?" Dad says, "I sleep like baby." A newborn who wakes up every 45 minutes!

but all their songs grow faint;

Did any of you see the movie *Quartet*? Some of you did. The story is set in a community for retired musicians. One of the musicians, one of the lead characters, Jean, is terrified because three of the residents want her to join them to perform the Act 3 quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Jean refuses because her voice is gone. In one scene she walks into the dining room and says to the other members of the old quartet, "When did you last sing? This morning in the shower? Has anybody heard you recently? We are all 98, and you want us to sing *Rigoletto*? It's insanity!" One of them asked, "What made you stop singing?" She replied, "You have to understand. I was *someone* once."

but all their songs grow faint;

The voice is no longer rich and powerful. It is no longer crisp and beautiful.

5 when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets;

Often there can be a heightened anxiousness that comes as we age. We are vulnerable. We are afraid of falling and breaking a hip. We are losing control of our lives. By way of editorial comment, there are *cause* groups who prey on the fears of the older population. Letters come in the mail that say, "Social security is going away. Send us money to help preserve your Social Security." "Medicare is going away. Send us money to help preserve your Medicare." "Muslims are taking over our country so send us money to preserve your freedoms." And on and on. In the later years there is an increasing fear of *dangers in the streets*.

when the almond tree blossoms

When an almond tree blooms, it is covered with white flowers. For some of us, part of the aging process is the glory of white hair. For some of us, it is jealousy that that will never happen for us.

and the grasshopper drags itself along

When our gaits and our limbs are ungainly like the awkward steps of a grasshopper, like walking with crutches or canes or walkers,

and desire no longer is stirred.

Enough said about that!

Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

There can be a fading capacity for joy and our destination is the grave. Death is the ultimate outcome of decline, and it is a sad time for those who are growing older and their loved ones, who are left behind. *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth*.

Let's stop and take a deep breath. There is a lot of heaviness in all that. This is a hard passage. It does not seem like there is much joy here. Why is Solomon so glum, so somber? Because he understands that life is fleeting. He understands what can happen as we grow older and he wants us to remember our Creator now while we still have time. In his book *Nearing Home*, Billie Graham writes about the challenges of growing older. He says, "All my life, I have been taught how to die and I am prepared for death, but no one has ever told me how to grow older. It's the hardest thing I have ever had to do." Old age is inevitable if we live long enough, and as Solomon says, old age definitely has its downside. Billie Graham writes in that same book, "The best way to meet the challenges of old age is to prepare for them now before they arrive." *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth*. Remember your Creator while you still have time.

I mentioned earlier that I spent four nights with my dad in a hotel room in Connecticut. Mom died in January of this year and we had a memorial service for her in their community in Florida. In April we scheduled a memorial service for her in their home church in Connecticut. I flew down

to Florida to get dad and we flew up to Connecticut together. Dad has some significant memory loss. Sometimes he can't remember that Mom is gone. Sometimes he'll phone me and ask, "Dan, where is Mom? I can't find her." He is beginning to lose track of some of his grandkids. At times he can't remember if he had lunch or what he had for lunch or even if he went to the dining room. In many ways the trip to Connecticut was very good but in other ways, it was challenging and difficult and confusing. Some things and people he remembered, but many other people and places, he did not.

We shared a hotel room in Connecticut and the second night as we were getting ready for bed, out of the corner of my eye I saw my dad drop to the floor. At first I was afraid that he had fallen, but then I did what any good son would do, I grabbed my camera. Dad had not fallen and this is what I saw. [Picture of Dad kneeling by the side of his bed to pray.] This was a habit for him.

At this point in his life, if I were to talk with him about becoming a Christian or following Jesus or remembering his Creator, he probably wouldn't have the capacity to put all that information together and make an intelligent decision. But when he was young, in the days of his youth, he made a decision to remember his Creator, to follow his Creator, and over the years, it has become a habit for him to fall on his knees at bedtime and talk to his Savior. *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* Remember your Creator when your mind is sharp in the days before sadness comes.

Now some of you may say, "I'm not old. I've got a lot of time left," and perhaps you do. Probably you do. But recently I sat with Julie as she recounted what had transpired in her life these past 4½ months and by the way, Julie told me that I could tell her story. It's not mine, it's her story. In June, life was good, really good. Bill, her husband of 20 years, set up a special trip to Kauai where he proposed again to her on a remote Hawaiian beach. He hired a photographer. He hired a minister. He dropped to his knees and said, "Will you be my wife for the rest of our lives?" And she said, "Yes." It was a wonderful anniversary honeymoon.

They came back to Minnesota where he took new job as CFO of a fairly prominent company here in the Twin Cities. Bill had been active in Bible studies and Sunday Communities at our church. He was one of those guys who lived his faith in his home, in the community, and at work. He set an example of accountability and integrity for other men to follow. In August, Bill flew to North Carolina for a family reunion. Julie drove their three daughters in the car to stop and visit some colleges along the way. On Tuesday, August 13, Bill phoned and said he was having a wonderful time with his brothers and he was looking forward to Julie and the girls joining them. It was a quick call because they were going water skiing. After not skiing for ten years, Bill got up on the first try. He went around once, kicked off a ski, and gave the high sign to pick up speed. Then he let go of the rope and dropped into the water. At age 44, his heart gave out.

Here is what I know about Bill. While it was not his choice or the choice of any one of us for him to die on that Tuesday afternoon, as far as I know, Bill was ready to meet his Creator. He had remembered his Creator in the days of his youth while he could. That relationship was settled and as Bill sank into the lake, he landed in the arms of Jesus. Here is the deal, my friends. The wise King Solomon reminds us to get this relationship with our Creator right while we still have our wits about us before the sad days come.

At the graveside of Lazarus, Jesus spoke to Martha.

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; **26** and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

And then He asked her,

Do you believe this?" **27** "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe [John 11:25-27]

Our friend Bill's favorite passage of Scripture was Ephesians 2:8.

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

We are made right with our Creator through faith in Jesus Christ, and here is the bottom line. As we close the door on one year and open the door to the new, let's be sure to make the good choice. Let's commit or re-commit our lives to faith in Jesus. *Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.