

Alzheimer Religion
Deut. 6: 20-25; James 1:22-25

[Diane's experience working with Alzheimer patients]

Insidious disease—robs one of their very self

They look normal and healthy [elab]

Yet, that which used to be a person is now a hollowed out body. No self left.

One could say that we are experiencing this weekend a form of national Alzheimer disease.

Is there anything in our B-B-Qs and beer bashes and fireworks to remind us of the meaning of Independence Day?

A friend: "Independence Day? I just thought it was the 4th of July!"

Stars and Stripes Forever has been replaced by Tchaikovsky's *The 1812 Overture*, a piece celebrating Czarist Russia's victory over Napoleon!

July 4th is just one more excuse for a party, and not even a day off for many.

This is not merely the carping of one who remembers better days.

For, a nation or people who no longer remember why they are free will soon forget how to remain free.

The lessons of history are replete with the rise and fall of great nations.

Historians are in almost unanimous agreement that one of the universal reasons civilizations decline is loss of memory.

They simply forget who they were and why they were. Alzheimer nations.

When this present Congress convened, the House leadership began by reading the Constitution to its members.

The idea was to remind Representatives of the importance of and the basis of their responsibilities. Good idea.

Unfortunately, in order to make the most of this idea, they decided to omit the seamier side of the Constitution by not reading such things as

"Slaves shall count as 3/5 of a person."

Ignoring our past leads to forgetfulness, and forgetfulness leads to the possibility of repeating it.

Ancient Israel is a good case in point.

The history of Israel is an account of one episode of forgetfulness after another.

The very beginning of Israel's history is of a nation of slaves to Egypt.

The biblical account begins, "And they knew not Joseph."

[elab on Joseph] Knew not God or Abraham, either. [Who shall I say sent me?]

The pattern for Israel is very clear from the accounts in the Book of Joshua

Cycle: A leader arises who reminds Israel of their covenant with God

They are led in faithful paths and return to God

They prosper

They grow fat and take their prosperity for granted

In their weakened state, they are taken captive by an enemy
A leader arises who reminds Israel of their covenant with God
The cycle continues, until Israel existed no more.
A victim of Alzheimer religion

Moses anticipated such a future and set in place means to stave off this forgetfulness.

He devised several memorials intended to keep Israel's memory intact.

Such is the purpose of holidays (holy days)

In our text from Deuteronomy we find the pattern

Reflect Remember Restore Reclaim

Reflect: *When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."*

Reflection involves bringing ourselves back to the beginning so we can remember

Remember: *the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good*

But remembering is not sufficient. Moses added that Israel must reenact this moment as if it were happening to themselves!

Restore

You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. ²⁵When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. ²⁶And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' ²⁷you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'

Reclaim that once lost memory in order to come back fully to life once again.

That puts an end to Alzheimer religion

Independence Day, Memorial Day, Presidents Day, all our holidays are to help us return to that sense of ourselves that make our nation great through reflecting, remembering, restoring and reclaiming our past that we might continue to have a worthwhile future.

As Christians, we have such memorials to assist us from falling victim to Alzheimer religion.

One very special to us is the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper can keep us from falling victim to memory's loss.

For instance, as we gather together at the table we remember that Jesus also broke bread with his disciples, with sinners, and with tax collectors.

Indeed, Jesus invited everyone to his table.
Like some congressmen, we might like to ignore some of the messier side of our heritage and prefer not to rub shoulders with the like of those who were Jesus' constant companions.

But we do so at our peril. For if we do, we leave behind us the mission of Jesus, and our faith crashes on the shoals of an unfit gospel.

We also gather in remembrance of all that he was and is.

We remember his life, his teachings, his death, and his resurrection.

We do this because he called on us to share in the bread and the cup in remembrance of him.

There is an irony here. Jesus focused like a laser beam on God.

Whenever the disciples got carried away, he took their focus off him and redirected it to God.

“Why call me good. Only one is good, my Father.”

“Don't cling to me; let me go. For I must go to your God and my God.”

“If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

In communion, we remember that Jesus always pointed us toward God.

But we don't simply come to remember, we also come to the table to experience the unity of ourselves with God and with each other.

For as Paul put it, “because there is one bread and one cup, there is one body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17).

So when we approach the communion table today, we are engaging ourselves in something much greater than what may appear on the surface.

We are engaging in an act that restores to us our lives

by reminding ourselves of whose we are

and what we are to be.

Most scholars agree that the Lord's Supper was central to the life of the early church, and that they gathered specifically for this purpose over all others.

Their regular observance of this rite kept them connected to their God
and to one another.

By our faithful reflection, remembrance, restoration and reclamation of the Lord's Supper,
we will keep alive those connections, too,

and avoid succumbing to Alzheimer religion. AMEN