

THE ALZHEIMERS GOD
February 7, 2016 –Communion –Jeremiah 31: 31-34
The Church of the Covenant

It is estimated that more than 5 million people suffer from Alzheimer's Disease (AD) in the United States, or more people than who live in the state of Colorado (Fricker, *Elder Care: The Road to Growing Old is not Paved*, p. 98) This is a cruel disease that robs a highly effective, vivacious and intelligent person of their memory, short term first and then eventually long term, and robs them of the ability finally to swallow and then even to breathe. For the caregivers of people with Alzheimers there are few things harder than seeing their loved one slip away by inches. So I begin by saying that the sermon that follows is meant to be a sensitive use of the idea of forgetfulness as relates to God and our sin. And, obviously, I would hope, it may open up conversations and pastoral opportunities for me as a pastor and us as a congregation to address.

But the issues raised by the Greek word, *anamnesis*, "remembrance", which forms the core of a concept such as amnesia, or forgetfulness. When Jesus declares in communion and as is recorded at I Corinthians 11: 24: "*Do this in remembrance of me*", he is referencing this concept. Remembering and forgetting have as their root the same Greek word. When we celebrate communion at the conclusion of this sermon we will hear the words of Jesus referencing both remembrance and also forgetfulness.

My dear sweet great aunt, Aunt Emily, suffered from Alzheimer's disease. She was a brilliant woman. She was extraordinarily well-read; books lined shelves on every wall and were stacked and filled every closet of her large home. She was a person of deep and profound faith. She was intelligent, opinionated and articulate. She was fastidious and perfectly coifed and beautifully dressed. But Alzheimer's was to claim this all. I love Great Aunt Emily and she was like another grandmother to me. So it is with great affection that I share what I now share.

We moved her to the Pittsburgh area from Chicago and she joined the church I then served. I would visit her in a care facility and eventually she would forget who I was and call me "Sir". I remember visiting her one time and I forgot my umbrella in her room, realized it before I got back to my car, returned and entered her room, and she was delighted to see me. It was as if I had not been there 2 minutes before. And she was just as delighted to see me two minutes later as she had been the first time I visited her! It also reminded me of the grandmother of a dear friend, a former female associate pastor of a former church, Leslie, who was getting married to her fiancée, and would tell her grandmother she was getting married, and each time the grandmother would have forgotten that Leslie was engaged and getting married, so was delighted and exquisitely happy each time she heard the news. It was new and fresh every time!

The prophet Jeremiah notes that through the new covenant in the shed blood of Jesus Christ that God "*will remember their sin no more*" (*Jeremiah 31: 34*) The word used is the Hebrew version of the Greek word *anamnesis*. So God promises that in the NEW COVENANT in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary that He will "*forgive their iniquity*", we will "*know the Lord*" intimately and spiritually and personally, the law will be "*written upon their heart*" –an internal rather than an external obedience, and He promises, "*I will be their God and they shall be my people.*" (*Jeremiah 31: 33*) The analogy is this –every time we return to our heavenly Father, HE is delighted that we return. Just like every time Aunt Emily saw me she was over the top delighted to see me, that's the way God is with us. Every time we ask our heavenly Father for forgiveness HE rejoices and is exquisitely happy to do so, just like every time my former associate pastor, Leslie, told her grandmother that she was getting married

and her grandmother was super delighted to hear the good news. God never tires of welcoming us into close personal relationship with HIM. He forgives, ah, but HE also forgets our iniquity, our past, and our failings and shortcomings. Every time. Delighted. Over the top. Excited. It is always good news to HIM because He remembers our sin no more. It is completely washed away. There is no trace of it left. It is erased perfectly. Not even a memory of it in the mind of God. It is why I refer to HIM as The Alzheimers God.

My dear sweet great Aunt Emily eventually transposed her Mother for MY Mother. In other words, every time she saw MY Mother she saw her Mother (who had died many years before). Now this was sad on some level, and especially for my Mother. But Aunt Emily's mind saw what it wanted to see, not necessarily what was there before her. Her love of her own Mother saw her own Mother when my Mother showed up to visit Aunt Emily. When we return to God, when we seek His face and enter into His presence, what does God see in relation to us? Firstly, he does not see our past and our mistakes for these are perfectly erased by the blood of Jesus. But WHO He sees is also important. For He sees not us, imperfect and flawed as we are and will ever be. No, He sees His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, standing right before Him. He sees the perfect obedience of Christ, not our failings. He sees the only begotten Son, whom He loves. The mind of God sees the perfected work of Jesus on the cross, not all the many times we have failed Him and fallen away from His presence. When we enter His presence with Jesus alive in our heart through the power of the Holy Spirit, God sees His Son alive within our heart. Saith the Lord –“I will remember your sin no more. For all I see in you is My Son, Jesus!” He is THE ALZHEIMERS GOD...

So when I say in our communion service which follows, the phrase, *“Do this in remembrance of me”*, I want you to realize that God has perfectly forgiven and erased and remembers our sin no more...and I want you to realize that as we come into the living presence of God today, that who HE sees is His only begotten Son, whom He loves with a deep, abiding, almost frighteningly awesome passion. How HE sees Jesus is how HE sees you and me.

Lord, don't you tire of me messing up in the same way over and over again? Surely, you will not forgive me yet again for messing up the same way and one more time? “Why, my son, I have no idea what you mean. I am just so exceptionally delighted to see you.”

Why would you ever seek to flee from the presence of this kind of God????? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

P.S. You may want to read the book by Buckley Fricker, “Elder Care: The Road to Growing Old is Not Paved” or be in contact with our wonderful church, “Hands and Hearts Committee” for help and support. God bless you! I am praying for you!