

December 10 – The Remembrance of Christmas Past

Isaiah 11:1-9, I Corinthians 13:12-13

The past. It is quite a small phrase for something representing everything that has happened up until your hearing this word. Because the past is so vast, we break it down into smaller bits. There is the recent past, our past, and so on. Pile enough past time together and we give it a new name, history. Today we are going to look at the time Scrooge comes face to face with his past as he is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past.

Scrooge, it seems, has forgotten his own story. The Ghost of Christmas past takes Scrooge on a journey through his memories, the way you or I might flip through a photo album or Facebook news feed if you are into social media. These remembrances bring him both joy and pain. Their purpose is to try to help remind Scrooge of who he was and from where he came.

His first task on the road to redemption is to remember his story, who he was before the desire for money became all-consuming. As he relives his past, it immediately begins to evoke a change in Scrooge because these memories have a common theme, which is love. As Scrooge remembers how he once loved life and people, he is not left unaffected. This should not surprise us. I Corinthians the 13th chapter is all about the nature and power of love. It ends by saying that one of the greatest of forces in our lives is love.

The first memory is to his hometown, and immediately Scrooge was filled with joy. As he sees his former friends riding in a sleigh, throwing a snowball, his lip quivers and a single tear falls upon his cheek. Scrooge had probably not felt that type of joy or that much emotion in decades.

Do you have happy memories that, when they are recalled, overwhelm you? We all do. Upon remembering them and the joy we felt at that moment, are we not a bit surprised that we have not hung on more tightly to that memory? Recalling those memories can change how we look at life today.

I think of the man who had a falling out with his brother. One day he and his sister got to telling stories about the good old days. She said, "Remember?" and went on to tell of a time their brother had stood up for them at school against a bully. Their brother ended up

in a fight but the bullying stopped. That memory, long forgotten, caused him to call his brother and begin mending fences with the boy who had been there for him instead of the man who had acted in less positive ways.

Like Scrooge, our memories are not always accurate. Sometimes, just like him, our visions of the past are incomplete or misleading, emphasizing sadness while forgetting joy. Too often we hang tightly to the misfortunes and, like Scrooge, forget that there so many good times as well. We need to be reminded of the joy.

The interesting thing is the response of Scrooge when he does see a past potentially bitter memory. Seeing his former self at the school by himself he realizes, maybe for the first time, how utterly lonely he was as a child. His friends failed to invite him on a sleigh ride, his family was so distant they are not included in his Christmas-past vision, and his own imagination was his only companion. Upon recalling this part of his past, it did not make Scrooge angry or cause him to feel justified in his treatment of humanity. Instead, these memories moved Scrooge to compassion. He remembers the boy singing carols at his keyhole and laments missing an opportunity to make a difference for another. This is the beginning of his reclamation. This is the power of love that Paul wrote about.

Scrooge starts to build a relationship with himself, or at least the person he used to be, before love of life was replaced with love of wealth. In his memories he sees a different way of looking at life. We lit today the candle of hope. Hope is seeing a future that is different from present realities. Hope is where, as Isaiah proclaimed, the needy will be treated righteously and the lion will lie down with the lamb.

Where do we need to find redemption from the past? Where do we need to see a hopeful future? All of us have bitter events that have occurred in our lives. We can hang on to them and use them to justify our current behavior. Too many people let negative moments define all of their futures. I have often heard, "I do, say, and act the way I do now because..." Almost always, they lift up a past negative event as justification for behaving badly today. I am still waiting for the person to point out a past event as a reason they act kindly, lovingly or joyfully today.

Jesus came to free us from such a life of regret. He wants to offer us forgiveness and challenges us to forgive others. We need to see that these bitter moments can move us

towards compassion instead of anger. Like Scrooge, perhaps we can do something today to make life easier for another so they do not have to suffer like we have.

Not all of the memories are negative for Scrooge. One of Scrooge's fondest memories centers on when he was an apprentice for a gentleman named Mr. Fezziwig. One Christmas Eve there was a grand party. Remembering that party brings Scrooge great joy. He enters into the gaiety with all of his heart. When the Spirit takes the view of the present day Scrooge and says Fezziwig should not be thanked for spending money foolishly Scrooge defends him. This moment is a further foreshadowing of Scrooge's redemption because it is rather shocking to hear him admit that money is not the source of happiness. It also makes him think about his clerk Bob Cratchit. He realizes how differently he treats him as opposed to Mr. Fezziwig. Scrooge is beginning to realize how the person he is doesn't look much like the person he once was. His striving for wealth has consumed any hint of love or joy he once knew.

One of the last memories he saw gave Scrooge great pain. It was his breakup with the one love of his life, Belle. She was the first to identify that his striving for wealth was destroying all the more noble aspects of his character. The man she had fallen in love with would give a coin to a caroler, would dance at a party and remember his employees with kindness. She came to understand that she could not live with a man who weighed everything by its value. She knew that someday he would resent even her because she had no dowry. Seeing this memory, painful as it might be, ultimately helps Scrooge to see where his life diverged from what it could have been. To drive home the point, the Spirit shows him one past Christmas not related to Scrooge's own life. It is of Belle surrounded by her children and loving husband. For Scrooge it became a torment and he snatched the candle snuffer the spirit carried and thrust it upon its head. He may have snuffed out the light but the memories remained. The Ghost of Christmas Past is sharing a word of hope but it will be awhile before Scrooge can hear that word. For now, he wants to extinguish the memories, to go back to the way things are.

Our past shape our present identities and how we see the world. We cannot escape this fact. What can change is what we remember, what we forgive, and what we use as building blocks for our life going forward. To change is hard work. When Scrooge's nephew invites him to celebrate Christmas with them, Scrooge said, "Keep Christmas in your own

way, and let me keep it in mine.” He wanted to be left alone with his distorted view of reality. The memories brought to him by the Ghost of Christmas Past will not allow that to happen. The good news of our faith is God does not leave us alone. Jesus came to live amongst us because of God’s great love for us. We can be redeemed when we are open to new words of hope and life.

There is a bit of Scrooge in all of us because sometimes we have let past experiences so shape the present that it maybe has led us to a warped view of life. Jesus came to remind us that we are to offer forgiveness and to release those feelings. We need to remember all are beloved children of God and should receive grace. The people of Isaiah’s day longed for a time of peace and of justice. They would have to trust God as they moved forward and not let their past define their future. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the power of Love has been unleashed on the world. It will transform us and redeem us if we let it do its work.

Let me end by asking, “How is God calling you to use those past snapshots in your life to create a more hopeful future? How can God transform those memories into future blessings for you and for others?”

The Spirit of Christmas Past shows Scrooge his past memories, not to torment but to help him to learn and ultimately find a more hopeful future. Scrooge is beginning to realize how the person he is doesn’t look much like the person he once was. His bitterness has consumed any hint of love or joy he once knew. At this moment he is in torment, but it is not the end of the story.

As we move through the season of transformation and redemption of Scrooge may we too be redeemed, for there is a little bit of Scrooge in each of us. *“The miracle has just begun in YOU for the sake of the world... God Bless us Every One!”*