

One of the great things about having kids is that they teach you about yourself! With Brittany, our oldest, I learned why I would never be a good athlete. Among other qualities, I observed in her the ability to not look back when she made mistakes. Soccer is a fast game, and there's ample opportunities to make mistakes. In fact, if one never made mistakes, goals would never be scored because mistakes present the very opportunity for goals. As I watched many a game from the sidelines, I observed that some players would make a mistake and it would throw their whole game off. They couldn't seem to recover from their mistakes. But Brittany had the ability to move forward, even when she blew it, and in the end she'd usually make more excellent plays than bad ones. She could forget what happened behind her for the sake of what was ahead. I, on the other hand, seem very often to be looking back over my shoulder. My mistakes grieve me greatly. I'm better than I used to be, but I still find it difficult to forget what lies behind me for the sake of what is to come.

The Apostle Paul had lots of reasons to look backwards. He came from a good family tree--the favored tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of pure lineage, a zealous Pharisee. His resume looked good; according to the flesh and blood of life, he could boast that he was born and grew up on the right side of the tracks. And yet, this was not enough. There was something lacking in his life. He gave it all up in order to know Christ! The journey on the Damascus road changed everything for Paul.

Tom and I have been watching the BBC series "Upstairs, Downstairs". This series takes place in the historical setting of Edwardian England in the early 1900s. One's station in life was very important and essentially predestined. The servants hall was downstairs; the master and lady of the house lived upstairs. For the most part, all parties honored their stations in life. But some episodes of this TV series tell what happens when people don't accept their ordained places in society. When things get out of order, all hell breaks loose!

For the Apostle Paul all hell broke loose when he experienced the vision of Christ and everything about his past life, his station, his good family lineage is challenged. Paul breaks with his past and his life takes a radically different course. He writes about his "about face" with these words: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings...Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own...this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ."

The Apostle Paul could have spent the remainder of his life (after the road to Damascus) looking back with either longing or with regret at what had been, but he is able to forget about it! He is able to press on towards the goal of knowing Christ and experiencing new life in the Spirit.

I imagine the early Christians found themselves caught in the middle between who they were in the past (be they Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female) and the people they were called to become as followers of the way of Christ. Old habits are hard to break. Family ties run deep. Anyone who's tried to turn their life around understands the challenge of change. Paul writes to encourage them in their struggles to become something new, something beautiful for God even while they live in the midst of threats and danger.

We talk about the season of Lent as a time of letting go. And this is true. But a little different angle might be to "forget about it and don't look back." To make space in our lives and hearts for a new word, a piece of resurrection in the here and now, might mean to stop looking over our shoulders and to forget about the past. Of course, we are not going to erase from our

memory all our past mistakes. We hope to learn from them so as not to find ourselves repeating them.

This week Tom was on spring break but nevertheless, he graded papers and reviewed an article for a science journal. In his deliberate and careful reading, he found an inconsistency. I asked him if he'd figured out what the mistake was, and he said, "yes, because I made the same mistake in my dissertation research."

Yes, the mistakes of our pasts can guide us to recognize and avoid them in the future. But our movement is pressing forward; we are encouraged and offered strength to face the future unafraid and unencumbered by the guilt of the past, all those "what ifs and if onlys." We do not need to be incapacitated by our history because every moment in time is an opportunity for resurrection, something novel.

In process theology, we talk not about years, not months, not days, but we talk about moments. At each point in time, God's spirit is present to meet up with our intentions, and to offer a chance for change, for becoming--if only we will forget about what lies behind and press on to what is ahead. The propensity to just keep on keeping on doing the same things with the same results is not God's way. As Whitehead says: God is an adventurer. God is not timid or fearful or looking over the divine shoulder. God is bold, adventuresome, and brave, and God meets us in each moment to cheer us on, and to join in the adventure of constant and on-going creation.

The Call to Worship hearkens back to the invitation of God to ancient Israel to make a choice. God invites Israel to face forward; to become a new people, to choose whom they will serve. God invites Israel to choose life!

We've known people who just can't break with the past. They can't move forward because they can't forget the pain or injustice they have experienced. They become like Mrs. Havisham, who Charles Dickens describes as staying in her wedding dress in the reception hall with a moldy wedding cake after she has been jilted at the altar, and in this room she clings so tightly to her grudges that the future holds only bitterness.

Paul describes a forgetfulness that is not amnesia but intentional striving to choose life. Paul has heard Christ's message, and it was compelling. So as we listen to the message of the Christ today, all that would keep us down or hold us back, all the tapes of the past that discourage us--all these things--we are to forget about. We no longer must carry the "weight of the world" on our shoulders, but like that athlete who runs free, unencumbered, we race towards joyful living and towards the dawn of Easter. We press forward to learn more completely the message of Christ who chose life, death, and life anew. We don't look back because true life awaits us. So as we intend to not look back but forwards, I invite us to again read together our call to worship:

Leader: We are gathered in the presence of God, who asks us to choose between life and death, blessing and curse.

People: **We are gathered like the people of Israel, who were challenged to choose the way of life.**

Leader: Like them, we often follow the ways of death.

People: **Yet, like them, we have the freedom each day to begin anew by the grace of God.**

Leader: By our presence here, we are saying that we want to choose life one more time.

People: **Let us praise the God of love and life who has called us to this place. Amen.**