

“A New Year’s Resolution to Remember ... and to Forget”

Text(s): Mark 1:1-20

- Pastor Ken Nelson

There is an old anecdote about a man hired to paint the yellow dividing line on a road, back in the day when they did that work by hand. The story goes that the first day he painted several miles of line. The next day however he only painted about 500 feet, and the third day just 50 feet. His supervisor naturally asked why his production fell so fast and so far. The earnest and honest painter replied, *“I guess it’s cause I kept getting farther and farther away from the paint can.”* It may be that for some of us, the farther removed we are from 2011 - a trying year to say the least, the happier we’ll be. But our text is about baptism, the symbol of our hope in Christ, as well as the temptation of Jesus to forget his.

Like the paint can in our little story, baptism is but a vessel that contains the promises of our salvation. If we press the metaphor just bit further, baptism as a vessel, holds not illuminating or reflective paint, but the words that illumine our life of faith, that establish the lanes in which we are to walk as faithful followers, reflecting the image of Jesus Christ on the way. Narrow is the way, Jesus would say, that leads to eternal life and therefore few walk it. Baptism calls us to stay on the straight and narrow, but baptism is hardly a narrow way of life. Rather it expands our life, our view, our contribution to humanity. Writer Leonard Sweet said, *“Baptism by water and the spirit saves one, but serves many. It is the Spirit that gives faith its feet. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is like manna. It cannot be hoarded or saved-up for another day. “Saved-up” Spirit doesn’t become better. Unshared Spirit grows stale.”*

The Spirit descended upon Jesus in his baptism. But it was anything but a personal transaction between God the Father and Jesus the Son. Jesus himself would say, later in Mark’s gospel, *“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Baptism saves one, but serves many...when it is remembered and utilized. The temptation of Jesus in Mark’s gospel is subtle. Mark does not supply the particulars of the temptation. Matthew and Luke do, and from their accounts we know Jesus was tempted by present day needs like hunger and fatigue, and future possibilities, like power and reputation. Mark describes instead a temptation based on isolation. Jesus is tempted not by present need or future possibility, but a forgotten past...his baptism. Jesus’ temptation in Mark is predicated on Satan’s desire to separate Jesus from his faith, from his father, from his identity as a child of God.

Aaron Chambers, in his book *“Remember Who You Are”*, tells a story of the temptation to forget. A little boy visiting his grandparents was given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. He went back to Grandma’s back yard, where he spied her pet duck. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit. The duck fell dead. The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, *“Sally, let’s wash the dishes.”* But Sally said, *“Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn’t you, Johnny?”* And she whispered to him, *“Remember the duck!”* Johnny did the dishes. Later Grandpa asked if anyone wanted to go

fishing. Grandma said, *"I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper."* Sally smiled and said, *"That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it."* Again she whispered *"Remember the duck!"* Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing.

Several days went like this: Johnny was doing both his chores and Sally's. Finally he couldn't stand it. He confessed to Grandma that he had killed the duck. *"I know, Johnny,"* Grandma said, giving him a hug. *"I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."* What's your duck? What "duck" do you keep remembering? More importantly, by remembering that duck, what have you by intention or distraction forgotten? It is so much easier to replay our sins than to recall our salvation. It is easier to see the cracks in our lives than to remember that God in Christ has repaired the breach between us forever. It is easier to remember pain, than baptismal grace and God's promise of provision.

Satan tempted Jesus to forget. Satan's preference with us seems to be to tempt us to remember, always remember the past, to play for us like a broken record the tune of personal failures and regrets that plague every human, young or old. And don't you know we probably all have our "Sallys", people who find it convenient for one reason or another to keep whispering in our ear: *"Remember the duck."*

No! As we begin this new year and put to bed one that gave us plenty of forgettable and regrettable moments I offer this resolution for you....*"remember your baptism."* Remember God's grace. Get back to that can and paint the lines of a beautiful and valuable life...yours together with Christ. AMEN