

## Locating Ourselves: Past (Deut 6:4-9, 2 Tim 1:3-7; 3:14-15; Luke 22:14-20)

Ka mua, ka muri. We walk backwards into the future.

### Problem in the World

We live in a world, Paul Kingsnorth contends, that has untethered us and disconnected us from our past. Instead of seeking wisdom from those who've gone before us, we turn to Google and now AI for instant tailored answers, even for companionship and guidance in life. Wisdom has given way to knowledge, and knowledge is found not in the past but in the new.

We have been unrooted from our past, from anything much larger than ourselves. Our culture subtly tells us the past is irrelevant. We are tasked with inventing our identity, meaning and purpose. I mentioned in a sermon last year how universities sell themselves as places of self-discovery rather than learning from those who have gone before us.

Disconnected from this process of wisdom transmission that humans have done for millennia, Poet Robert Bly noticed a modern trend where adults “regress toward adolescence,” and seeing that, young people see little reason to mature toward wisdom. This is backed up by data, in the last couple of years, adults buying children's toys for themselves have overtaken toys for preschoolers, accounting for 28 percent of global toy sales! Now, I can't judge, I have a few “grown up Lego sets” myself! But the kidults is a fascinating phenomenon.

But it's not just wisdom we lose. Disconnected from this branching tree of generations, where wisdom and locating stories are passed down, we risk losing that **wisdom**, and also **hope**. Simone Weil wrote: *“Of all the human soul's needs, none is more vital than love of the past.”*

Cut loose from being part of a bigger story, from our roots, from wisdom that is handed down, things get a bit fragile. Hope wanes and despair can set in. At Davos, Canadian President Mark Carney named this fragility resulting from a break, a rupture from shared stories and assumptions of the last 80 years.

### Waitangi

This weekend we pause to remember our own national past. Waitangi is a powerful reminder to remember our national story, and the story of our Church in this land. Remembering should help us live more wisely—if we integrate the lessons that the past has to teach us: to live within this covenantal relationship in a mana-enhancing way for Māori and Taiwi alike.

Archbishop Justin Duckworth reflected:

“Waitangi [is] not just as a commemoration of the past, but as an act of tending the present. The whenua was here long before us. Iwi Māori were here long before us. And both will be here long after we're gone. Our calling, as people who love this land and each other, is to be good kaitiaki – good guardians – for this season we've been given.”

### **Scripture's Call to Remember**

Scripture is serious about the act of remembering—not simply as an act of thinking about the past, but so that we might live into the wisdom received, to locate ourselves in a story, *so that* we might have **hope** to navigate our current situations.

### **Deuteronomy 6**

In Deuteronomy, God instructs the people who have come out of slavery in Egypt to steep themselves in the story and teachings. To impress them on their children. To talk about them constantly. To fill daily life with visual reminders, so they would not forget.

Jewish families still practice this today. At Passover, the Haggadah (instructions) says each person should see themselves as personally coming out of Egypt. This is what it means to *remember*. This foundational story of the Exodus is not just something that their ancestors experienced, it was (and is) their locating story for making sense of new struggles, even in exile.

They knew the importance of formation and how stories form us. As Kingsnorth says, “we build and rebuild culture everyday, in the stories we tell our children and ourselves. Stories about who we are, where we came from and where we're going. Stories about the deeper meaning of human life, about what matters, about what we stand for and what we will not.”

Teach these things to your children. Talk about them at home and on the road, from morning until night.

I wonder what stories you inhabit about the world and its future? What stories you pass on? I have been convicted about bottling up stories inside but not thinking others might need to hear them. Or not repeatedly telling them. When we treat formative stories, particularly stories of our faith as information or knowledge, we can think – tick, I know the story of Joseph, or Peter, or Elijah. But we keep telling the stories because they are *formative*, not *informative*.

### **Luke 22**

Now, there is one formative story that Anglicans have been pretty good at repeating. That of course is the story at the centre of our faith, and the meal that we use to *remember* it – the eucharist. At the Last Supper Jesus tells his disciples to do this in *remembrance* of him.

The Greek word is *anamnesis*. This word is not just about historical reflection or memorial. It is a remembering that makes the past present. It is active, participatory remembering that leads to trust, faithfulness, and life as we locate ourselves in the story.

Just as Jewish families at Passover don't say: 'Our ancestors were freed from Egypt,' but: 'We were brought out of slavery.' So at the Table we don't say: 'Jesus died long ago.' Remembrance is not mere mental recollection; we proclaim and participate in his saving, healing, restoring work. Paul says as we eat and drink together, we are showing forth Christ's death and resurrection "until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The Eucharist therefore stands at the intersection of history, present experience, and future hope.

In the eucharist, we are incorporated into the gospel, into the life of Christ. It is recall and rediscovery of wisdom and hope in a story that holds: the confusion and fear of Maundy Thursday, the terror and agony of Good Friday, the darkness and despair of Holy Saturday, and the hope and doubt of Easter Sunday. Where are you right now in that story? This story holds you, Christ holds you, whatever you are going through. Suffering is not the end. Loss is held in a greater hope.

We locate ourselves in this story, every week, not as historical spectators, but as participants.

## 2 Timothy

This is why Paul can speak of faith being handed down from grandmother to mother to son. Of receiving the story and passing it on, it is a living story received and lived again. Timothy is urged: *"remain faithful to the thing you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you."*

I was recently reminded of this when I saw Rita-May reading again the biography of my Nan and Pop, Ben and Helen Applegate. After radically coming to faith in the 70s, they got in involved with YWAM, and Pop, after a long journey, was eventually the first captain of the mercy ship Anastasis. Their story is full of miracles. Of provision. Of healings. Of outright crazy stories of God at work in the world. I trust their stories, even though I myself haven't seen anything like. I long to see such things. I believe such things a possible because I can trust those who taught me.

And I think of my Poppie. Less dramatically miraculous, but quietly faithful. Of his absolute faithful service for God, serving his neighbour and those in need, always putting others before himself. A witness to faith lived out. They lived out the Scriptures, they were the word of God come alive, because they inhabited this story for me.

*"You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus."* Timothy could trust in Christ because his mother,

Eunice, his grandmother, Lois, Paul, and I am sure others in their faith community lived the story before him. Faith is passed on not just by words, but by lives shaped by the story of Jesus.

I wonder who it was for you? Who so lived out faith, that the stories of Scripture ceased to be something just in the pages in a book or something from the past?

I am confronted by this: at our ordinations, we are asked: **Will you so live the gospel that you challenge us with the demands of love?** Will you so live the gospel that you challenge us with the demands of love?

This isn't an optional extra for experts. We are all called to live in and live out of the story of Christ's love, life, death and resurrection that we all challenge one another with the demands of love.

Faith is passed on not just by words, but by lives shaped by the story of Jesus finding fresh expression in each of our contexts. And it must be fresh, Spirit-filled expressed because the past is not ours to permanently inhabit. As Mark Carney said in his speech, "nostalgia is not a strategy."

But we live into stories from the past so that we can better inhabit the present.

## **Conclusion**

Many today sense a loss of hope. When people lose where they come from, who they belong to and what story they are part of, despair finds fertile ground. But when we locate ourselves in Christ's story, a story that moves through suffering, death into resurrection life; hope becomes possible again.

We are called to be a remembering people. Steeped in the story and passing it on.

*"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have **hope**." – Romans 15:4*

We are not people adrift in the present moment. We are people with roots and a story. We find hope by remembering rightly with endurance. By locating ourselves in the great story of God centred on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And at the centre of it stands Christ: the One who was broken, the One who rose again, the One who invites every generation to find new life in Him.

The past of course is not ours to inhabit, nor is the future. Our is the present. Let us awaken to the wonder of the moment. To be kaitiaki, stewards of what we have received, and to be people of compelling wisdom and hope in an untethered world. Amen. Let us pray.