

“Take care that you do not forget the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 6. 10-12

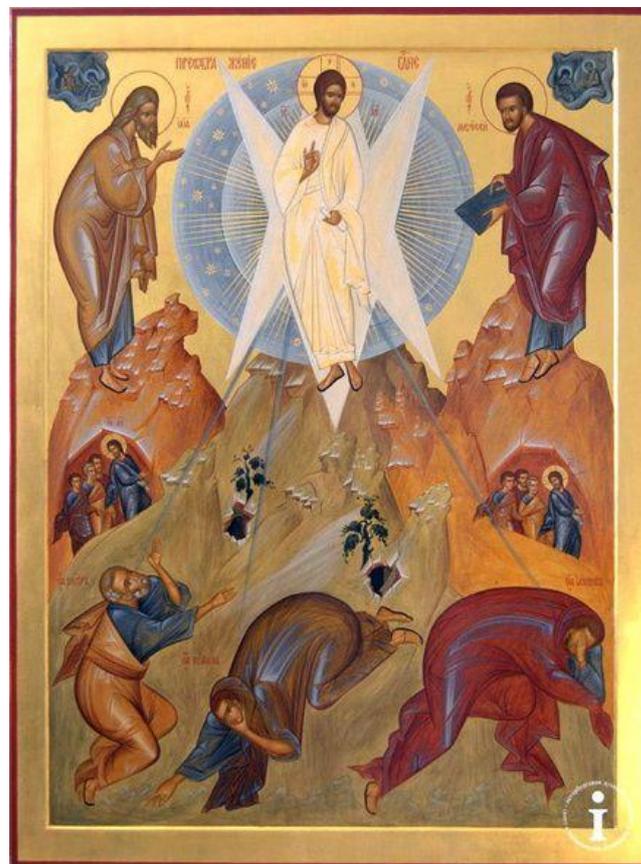
When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Reflection

Silence (10 mins)

Lord’s prayer

The Grace



The Transfiguration of the Lord, perhaps by Theophanes the Great.

Reflection:

Arguably the foundation of all Christian life is the practice of *memoria Dei*, the 'remembrance of God'. By faith we profess that in God we 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17.28). The fact remains, though, we often live as though God did not exist. One of my biggest fears, something that genuinely keeps me awake some nights, is that the Church of England could function perfectly well and we could all happily go about as normal even if God did not exist, because often so much of our energy is spent on things that are not of God: things that are not attentive to his ways, not attentive to the movement of his spirit.

We are an organisation like many others, and so much of the process required in the smooth running of our organisation is necessary, I recognise that. Our buildings need maintaining, we need a strategy for deciding where we invest our resources and what we spend our money on. Those of us who work full time in the church are very grateful for the stipends supporting us to do so. I know all of this, and I'm not arguing that those things should be abandoned. But very often when I stand back and observe the things that we seem to think are extremely important, Moses words to Israel ring loudly in my mind: 'Take care that you do not forget the Lord'.

To keep a perspective on existence broad and high enough to count God in it is what the Greeks called *ascesis*, an athletic exercise of the spirit. The call to 'beware' is helpful. It shifts remembrance of God from the realm of thought to that of consciousness. Be aware of God. To be affective, the *memoria Dei* must penetrate our awareness at every level, and so everything we do. *Everything* we do.

What is it to be aware? The word is traced to an Old German root, *war-*, and we encounter it first in the ninth century when the verb *waron* was used with a twofold sense, meaning variously to 'take note of' and 'take care of'.¹ In English too, the root suggest dual significance: I am *aware* that Coral is working upstairs because I can hear her singing along to Broadway musicals at the top of her voice; I *beware* if I ask her to turn it down a notch. The second sense is pragmatic (protection) and the first is different. The first is about observation, and it is imbued with intellectual meaning. To be 'aware' in modern English is not merely a passive noticing of what is going on around us, but to demonstrate the capacity for sympathetic interest. It is to cultivate the disposition of opening our eyes and looking. The habit of watching, and perhaps waiting.

¹ E. Varden, *The Shattering of Loneliness; on Christian Remembrance*, (Bloomsbury, 2018), pg 131

For me, this rings the contemplation bell again. True contemplation is not passive observation, it is to relinquish reverie; to ascertain that there is more to life than just me, or just us; to admit that something more, someone more, may have a claim on my attention.

By making us in his image, God made us capable of knowing him (as we discussed in our very first sessions). Such knowledge is the basis of right relationship with God, the basis of 'not forgetting' or 'unforgetting' God. The basis of remembering him, and thus remembering who we really are and what we really are called to be. It is through knowledge of God, given as a gift in the very beginning and squandered through sin, that the vast chasm separating human beings from their maker may be bridged.

Such were the original intentions of God. Such were we, originally. Our rebellion against God, however, blinded our knowing and our remembering. Finding us forgetful, unaware of God's image within us, the Lord hoped that the beauty of creation might raise our minds back to him. It was not enough. He sent prophets. We did not listen. We were unaware of anything beyond what we could see and touch.

And so. God 'assumed a body from below', so that even the most hopeless cases, those who struggle to see past the end of their noses, even Anglican clergy, have the possibility of knowing and remembering their creation and their creator. In Jesus Christ, God has assumed everything that is fully human – a category that, of course, excludes sin.

When God became man, the image in which we were first made, which we are all still called to embody, stood before us in flesh and blood, for us to see and touch. For us to 'un-forget'. As a result, in a sense, it is not a fatal disadvantage to have our eyes drawn to the things of this world. Our senses and our human reality now enjoy access to the work of redemption.

We are engaged in some very heavy remembering at present. We are remembering a time when we were able to gather together for worship, when we were able to gather at the altar to share together in the elements of redemption and the food of eternal life. It is shocking, still. And it is not forever. We will gather together again and, I think, all of this will feel like a bad dream. But I am certain that this strange time has some very useful and profound things to teach us, and one of them is true *remembrance*, true *un-forgetting*. I could not have foreseen this when I started writing the material for this course and, of course, I am not glad this has happened. But I do wonder what things we might cultivate in this seemingly fallow time, that might enrich our common life when things return to 'normal'.

I think we are gifted with the opportunity to *be aware*, to 'beware lest we forget the Lord'. And in that sense we have something extremely useful and lasting to offer to this world of changes and chances beyond control. True contemplation, true awareness of God is necessary now more than ever.

My prayer for us all as we enter Holy Week and anticipate the laughter and liberty of Easter is that we may come to know, to *beware*, to *un-forget* God more deeply. And in so doing, be a true blessing to this weary and hurting world.