

Wednesday July 31, 2013

Remembering to remember

By Jim Taylor

My wife and I marked two anniversaries this month. Early in the month, we celebrated our 53rd wedding anniversary; a week ago, we celebrated 20 years since we moved into our new house.

And I wonder why we consider remembering anniversaries so important.

It's not as if I'm likely to forget that I'm married. After 53 years, I've spent far more of my life married than I did single. Being married is ingrained so deeply, now, that I can no longer imagine life in the loose lane.

Nor are either of us likely to forget moving into this house. We had to vacate our Toronto home before our new house in the Okanagan was ready. So we drove across Canada, with two terrified cats and a back seat full of house plants.

I came all the way west to Kelowna and roomed for a month with my friends Ralph and Bev Milton. Joan stayed with her mother in Creston, a day's drive away.

The day our house was finally ready for us, Joan drove six hours through the mountains. On a hot summer day, with the car windows closed to keep frantic cats from leaping out. The house plants travelled well. But both cats got carsick.

Nope, Joan is not likely to forget that day.

Unnecessary reminders

Nor am I likely to forget the day our son died. Or the day we picked up our adopted granddaughter in Ethiopia. Or the day I fell off a wall and smashed my elbow.

I don't need notes on a fridge calendar to carry a constant awareness of those events with me.

Why, in fact, do we celebrate anniversaries? Like birthdays – especially when we lie about them?

Why, in the Christian Church, do we make special events out of Christmas and Easter and host of lesser days? Ignoring them would not change history. Especially when at least one of those anniversaries – Christmas, the birth of Jesus -- probably didn't happen when we celebrate it, and almost certainly didn't happen exactly 2013 years ago.

The timing of Easter and Good Friday are more likely, but are based on a lunar calendar that we abandoned long ago. If accuracy mattered, we should probably link Easter permanently to the Jewish Passover.

And yet we go through those rituals, year after year. In churches, we hold special services. In our personal lives, we give cards and presents. Or go out for dinner. Or just spend a quiet evening together, wrapped in a prayer shawl of memories.

What makes us, us

Remembering is not the problem – despite comedy routines built around stereotypes of forgetful husbands and disappointed wives.

I think there's something more subtle going on. Anniversaries are not just about specific events. They're about the importance of remembering in general.

Remembering defines us as humans. Our ability to remember, not just the last few days or the last few years, but all the growth and development through history that has made us who and what we are, makes us who and what we are.

So we need anniversaries. To remind ourselves that it's important to keep remembering.

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YOUR TURN

Sorry, no mail this week. By the time you read this, I'll be back home, but during the time when I should be sending or receiving your e-mails, I'm hiking in the Rocky Mountains where there are no currant bushes to plug into. (Groan...)

PSALM PARAPHRASES

Psalms 107 may have been written following the mass Exile of the Jews into Mesopotamia: it thanks God for deliverance from homelessness. It seems to me that homelessness has become endemic around the world today. The Guardian newspaper refers to 45 million homeless people wandering in the wilderness or struggling to survive in refugee camps.

1 Speak up, you who believe in the Lord;
Give thanks to God, for God is good;
God never stops loving.
2 Say it out loud;
If we fail to tell of God's embrace, how will anyone know?
3 We are the people of God, wherever we are:
North or south, east or west,
rich or poor, powerful or helpless.
4 We wander homeless among people who don't want us,
We drift like ice floes in the Arctic.
5 We lack food and drink;
We lack companionship and compassion;
We are ready to give up.
6 But you heard our cries, Lord.
You gave us a sense of our own worth.
7 You pointed us towards a new home;
We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
8 This is our faith, and this is our God.
9 God sustains us.
When we are thirsty, we receive rain;
When we are hungry, we are fed manna.
Thanks be to God.

For this and other paraphrases, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publications, info@woodlake.com or 1-800-663-2775 in Canada.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
