

***“Forgetting to Remember”***

May 25, 2008

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PRAYERS:

*“Wells we did not dig”* —Deuteronomy 6:10-12

10 And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not.

11 And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

12 Then beware, lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

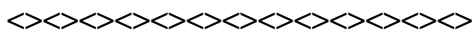
*“Antropology”*

by Phyllis Sterling Smith

Ants keep no history.  
The rains come,  
The day turns cold,  
And the first ant scouts appear  
To tour my kitchen counter,  
Fanning out across the tile,  
Measuring, evaluating,  
Antennae probing alien air.  
Tonight entire colonies will come,  
A restless, swarming invasion  
In search of winter shelter.

Ants keep not history.  
If they did they would remember  
How last year  
And the year before  
And all the years before,  
Their sorties have been foiled,  
Their numbers decimated,  
Their finest troops repelled  
Or felled by clouds of poison gas:  
Chemical warfare.

Tonight the ants will come.  
Ants keep no history.



## SERMON:

One of my most vivid memories growing up in the little town of Clyde, Ohio, was the annual Memorial Day parade. It was one of only two parades our town celebrated—the other being Halloween. All us kids would decorate our bicycles with streamers and those playing cards hooked on the frame with clothespins against the spokes so as to make a loud clacking sound like a motorcycle as we rode along.

There were the marching bands from Clyde High School, the Veterans of Foreign Wars contingent, the mayor riding in a convertible, perhaps accompanied by last year's Homecoming Queen, and the Boy and Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts and Campfire girls. The parade was a true community event and now, after all these years, I realize how deeply embedded it is in my psyche. To this day, as against war and militarism and patriotic displays as I am, tears invariably well up in my eyes when I watch a parade.

As I recall these things, I realize that it wasn't until I was grown that I understood what that parade was really about. Maybe I was in college when I heard the history of Memorial Day, how it was in 1868 the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of veteran Union troops, chose May 30 as "Decoration Day" in commemoration of America's fallen soldiers. And how it was renamed Memorial Day after World War II to honor the slain soldiers, separating itself from Armistice Day and Veteran's Day. And how, in 1971, an act of Congress created the three day weekend we now know and which also marks the start of summer.

Memorial Day is a federally mandated occasion to remember. When you think about it, it's a fairly remarkable thing for the government to say, "Today is the day to remember." Admittedly, most folks nowadays don't actually do that, since Memorial Day is the official beginning of the summer travel season and most people are primarily remembering the price of gasoline last year.

Churches—and this church in particular—are different, I hope. I hope that we can take this time to remember not only the fallen soldiers of our nation's many wars, but all those who have gone before us and have made the way for us to live our lives the way we do.

In truth, remembering is what religion is all about. Mircea Eliade is perhaps the greatest of all historians of religion. In his studies he says that all religious propensities come from the desire to remember. In particular, all religions have a story which explains how and why things are the way they are, and this is called "cosmology".

In our Judeo-Christian history this is the book of Genesis, which starts with the phrase, "In the beginning..." and then goes on to explain our world and where it came from. This is a lasting effect, for even today in the 21st century, Sunday (or, the Sabbath) is a special day of the week, of every week, at which time we are remembering the creation of the world.

And now we have an annual day of remembrance, Memorial Day.

So, I have several questions to ask on this day for all of us—the traditional "W's":

The first W is answered already: *When* do we remember? —today!

And then, *Why* do we need to remember?

*What* and *Who* do we need to remember?

And finally, *How* do we remember?

The *Why* question is answered when we say that we need to remember our beginnings and our history in order that we can know who and what we are. We need to understand where we came from in order to know where we're going. Just like the huge sign over the gathering place at Jonestown, we understand that "those who forget their history will surely be doomed to repeat it."

So, part of our remembering is, not only memorializing the makers of our history and the events of



“The issue brings up for me how much we take for granted all the ways we live our lives that were given to us, and what makes this most obvious to me is where what was given to me changed and got a lot better and did so in a way that I could have done on my own. What I’m thinking of is wheels on luggage. There are wheels on my piano, which is 100 years old, and has been moved probably once a decade. There have been wheels on office chairs for decades, and wheels on shopping carts, and wheels on those wire baskets that people wheeled their groceries home in. All of those have been around since the 1940’s. But, in 1980, I was carrying 100 pound bags through train stations and airports, and everyone was, and NO ONE was saying, “Why do I have to carry this? Why don’t they put wheels on these things?” And then someone did, and, once you saw it, it was the most obvious thing in the world. But really smart people didn’t think of it for years. Now we can take wheels on luggage for granted, so granted that we feel as if there was no invention to them. *Of course* there are wheels on luggage. We have no sense that someone sat down and gave those wheels to us. Except for those of us who are old enough to remember lugging the heavy suitcases without wheels.

“How much else do we enjoy and live in and take *for granted*, assuming that any sane and sensible person would have seen the value and need of that way of doing things? A lot.”

Let us take this day to remember and not to “take for granted”. Here’s some very good advice from my UU minister colleague, the Rev. Michael Boardman:

Remembering is a moral act  
In our remembering we take possession of a past.  
In our remembering we acknowledge who we are.  
In our remembering we keep alive our commitments  
and our aspirations.  
In our remembering we honor past heroism, sacrifice, and goodness.  
In our remembering we keep before us unfinished business.  
Our remembering can be with joy or grief, delight or sadness,  
peace or pain—  
Remembering is a moral act.  
In our remembering we acknowledge who we are.

Amen