

Thanksgiving Eve

November 23, 2016

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: Psalm 100; Psalm 138; Philippians 4: 4-7

“There once was a small boy called Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge and what’s more he wasn’t very old either. His house was next to an old people’s home and he knew all the people who lived there. He liked Mrs. Jordan who played the organ. He listened to Mr. Hosking who told him scary stories. He played with Mr. Tippett who was crazy about cricket. He ran errands for Miss Mitchell who walked with a wooden stick. He admired Mr. Drysdale who had a voice like a giant. But his favorite person of all was Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper because she had four names as he did. He called her Miss Nancy and told her all his secrets.

One day Wilfred Gordon heard his mother and father talking about Miss Nancy. “Poor old thing,” said his mother. “Why is she a poor old thing?” asked Wilfred Gordon. “Because, she’s lost her memory,” said his father. “It isn’t surprising,” said his mother. “After all, she is ninety-six.” “What’s a memory?” asked Wilfred Gordon. He was always asking questions. “It is something you remember,” said his father.

But Wilfred Gordon wanted to know more, so he [went next door and] called on Mrs. Jordan who played the organ. “What’s a memory?” he asked. “Something warm, my child, something warm.”

He called on Mr Hoskings who told him scary stories. “What’s a memory”“ he asked. “Something from long ago, me lad, something from long ago.”

He called on Mr. Tippet who was crazy about cricket. “What’s a memory?” he asked. “Something that makes you cry, my boy, something that makes you cry.”

He called on Miss Mitchell who walked with a wooden stick. “What’s a memory?”he asked. “Something that makes you laugh, my darling, something that makes you laugh.”

He called on Mr. Drysdale who had a voice like a giant. “What’s a memory?” he asked. “Something as precious as gold, young man, something as precious as gold.”

So Wilfred Gordon went home again to look for memories for Miss Nancy because she had lost her own.

He looked for the shoe-box of shells he had found long ago— last summer — and he put them gently in a basket. He found the puppet on a string which always made everyone laugh and he put that in the basket too. He remembered with sadness the medal which his grandfather had given him and he placed it gently next to the shells.

Next he found his football which was as precious as gold, and last of all, on his way to Miss Nancy’s , he went into the hen house and took a fresh, warm egg from under a hen.

Then Wilfred Gordon called on Miss Nancy and gave her each thing one by one. “What a dear, strange child to bring me all these wonderful things,” thought Miss Nancy. Then she started to remember.

She held the warm egg and told Wilfred Gordon about the tiny speckled blue eggs she had once found in a bird’s nest in her aunt’s garden. She put a shell to her ear and remembered going to the beach by tram long ago and how hot she had felt in her button-up boots. She touched the medal and talked sadly of the big brother she had loved who had gone to war and never returned.

She smiled at the puppet on the string and remembered the one she had shown to her sister, and how she had laughed with a mouth full of porridge. She bounced the football to Wilfred Gordon and remembered the day she had met him and all the secrets they had told.

And the two of them smiled and smiled because Miss Nancy’s memory had been found again by a small boy, who wasn’t very old either.¹

Remember” St. Paul tells us. Lift up all your needs and concerns to God AND lift up your thanksgiving as well. When you have worries about your grandchildren, work, health or the nation — bring them to God **and** remember to bring your thanksgiving, too. When you need relief, guidance, healing, a solution — bring them to the Lord **and** remember your thanksgiving, too. St. Paul isn’t suggesting we bring our gratitude in order to butter God up or to complements to get on God’s good side. No. Paul had learned himself that when he himself had been heckled and scorned, stoned or banished by mobs, or imprisoned, he had still been able to rejoice in the Lord.... he had still known “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” Why? In part, because no matter the circumstances, the memories of God’s faithfulness to him and to God’s people throughout all of Scripture wrapped any hurt, fear or anxiety in the mercy and promises of a powerful, gracious, steadfast Lord. He found he had sufficient courage and hope to “rejoice in the Lord ” when he also remembered God’s goodness and provision in his life and in the lives of those he read about in Scripture. When he remembered that history of God’s saving love, he could release the fear and worry to make room for the peace of God to guard his heart and mind in Christ Jesus.”

That is what thanksgiving is all about. It’s about finding our memory. Pushing aside the busyness and stresses to be able to find those memories of those occasions, times, places when God was near, when God provided a way, when you rejoiced in God’s grace. Thanksgiving is about remembering all God has done and all God is doing and all God promises to do. While Jesus and St. Paul tells us to bring all your worries, pains and

requests to God in prayer, they also tell not to remember our thanksgivings. So this evening, I offer you some time to practice their advise.

When we do this with the Youth, we call it “popcorn prayer.” I will offer an open ended prayer and everyone is allowed to speak aloud what “pops” into their mind. So first, I ask you to think of those things that worry and weigh upon you.,, those things for which you need God’s help (Pause) Lord, trusting and rejoicing in you, we lift up our cares, concerns and worries, especially, those we say aloud

One of the gifts of a community in Christ is this: When one of us is losing our memories of God’s grace among his or her worries, we can be like Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge and help them find the .bearings of their memories and thanksgivings. Like this: (*Close your eyes for a moment.*)

-Remember something warm like a smile or hug or the sun on your face.

-Remember gifts from long ago like being held when you were scared or the special smells of grandpa’s cigar or grandma’s baking or your first shooting star.

-Remember those things that made you cry that you still wonder how it is you ever came through.

-Remember what makes you laugh and brings you joy ---- the unrestrained giggle of a child, silly stories, goofy moments.

-Remember what is as precious as gold --- like the loved ones here and those who can not be, like friendship and community and generosity.

And then remember who is the One who is the giver and provider, the strength and comfort, the source and giver of all that is good. The One who made possible all for which we are thankful, especially those things we name aloud at this time or silently in our hearts.....

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus this Thanksgiving and always. Amen

Linda M Alessandri

1. Mem Fox, Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge Brooklyn, NY and La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Book Publishers 1985.