

“Remember” ~ May 24, 2009: Deuteronomy 32:7

Years ago Frederick Buechner wrote a thoughtful sermon entitled, “A Room Called Remember.” In this sermon he described a dream. He mentioned that there are dreams that awaken us with tears and others that awaken us with laughter but there are more meaningful dreams that awaken us to kernels of truth.

In this dream he stayed in a hotel room that he loved. It wasn’t the appearance of the room or the comfort of its furniture that made him feel comfortable, but the way the room made him feel. It was a place in which he felt “happy and at peace, where everything seemed the way it should be and everything about myself seemed the way it should be, too.” He went on to explain that as his dream continued, he traveled to other places and did other things but eventually returned to the same hotel. The second time there he was not given his old room and felt very uncomfortable. So, he asked if he could move to the room he had enjoyed so much before. The clerk told him that he understood his feelings and knew the room he wanted. All he had “to do was ask for the room by its name.” So, he asked what the name of the room was, and the clerk he told him. “The name of the room was Remember.”

He was shocked into wakefulness and pondered the meaning and truth of the dream. He discovered that the strength of this room was not in being able to entertain the memories we all often entertain. Those thoughts that come to us when we hear an old familiar song, or drive a road we used to drive years ago, or think of an old book we read as a child or recall old friends. Instead, he wrote, when we enter, “the room called Remember,” we make a conscious decision to do so. We choose to think about what has gone on before to bring us to the place we are today. He continued, “...there is a need—not all the time, surely, but from time to time—to enter that still room, within us all, where the past lives on as part of the present, where the dead are alive again, where we are the most alive ourselves to the long journeys of our lives with all their twistings and turnings and to where our journeys have brought us. The name of the room is Remember—the room where with patience, with charity, with quietness of heart, we remember consciously to remember the lives we have lived.”

The idea is not to dwell in past memories, the good, the bad and the ugly, but that we allow ourselves time and space to simply remember.

This is a weekend in which we are called to remember—most of all the life of our country and the lives of those that have been sacrificed, and are being sacrificed, to preserve our free way of life. We owe a great debt to those men and women who have believed that our freedom is so precious that they gave their lives to sustain it. There are many who serve today for the same cause.

As I watched the news the other night, World War II veterans were being interviewed on the occasion of a visit to their memorial in Washington D.C. Without exception the interviews were emotional with this group of rapidly dwindling men and women. But many seemed to make one point, that it was nice to be remembered and finally honored in such a way. They were surprised by the welcome they received and the appreciation expressed to them by so many.

We are many years removed from that war and we must wonder how it is we will remember it as we all age. Who will keep the memory alive of those brave people who went into service for our country, feeling so passionate about it that some even forged documents to enlist in the armed forces at the tender age of 14? How will we help those who follow us remember?

Enter our tiny scripture reading from the book of Deuteronomy. “Ask your father and your elders and they will tell you.” Many of us are becoming those elders, those who carry the torch of remembrance. We are the ones who are responsible for keeping our history alive for others. We are the ones who need to deliberately enter the “room called Remember” not just to stir up and review our own personal memories but to remember the challenges that all have faced together in times of peace and in times of war that we may share what has happened before and how it is we have arrived at this time and place in history.

This is as important for us to do as it was for those who carried forth the memories that formed the Hebrew Scriptures and those who came later and did the same for the New Testament. When there are no longer people who choose to remember the history and the stories that have preceded us, we will find ourselves rootless, without anchor, without an understanding of our very beings. We will not have a solid base, a truth, from which to move forward to discover new ways of waging peace and a better way of doing things for all humankind. It is a heavy legacy we bear to remember and then teach our children well.

As I wrote I remembered that old Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young song that reinforces what it is we must do. Partial lyrics are:

Teach your children well
 Their father's hell did slowly go by.
 And feed them on your dreams
 The one they pick's,
 The one you'll know by.

And you of tender years
 Can't know the fear that your elders grew by.
 And so please help them with your youth
 They seek the truth before they can die.

To find the truth that ties our past our present and our future worlds together, we need to decide to enter that “room called Remember,” every now and the, and uncover with God's help the eternal truth which makes sense of all of life.

-- Amen

Buechner, Frederick, A Room Called Remember, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1984, pp. 1-12.