

Isaiah 49:1-5

Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, 'You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'
But I said, 'I have laboured in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the Lord,
and my reward with my God.'
And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength—

Deuteronomy 34

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants"; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.' Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses. Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

“Things I Want to Remember”

Rev. Charles Schuster

May 25, 2008

So there are children in the congregation today, and they're not used to being here this long, so I'm going to try to talk a little louder and maybe a little faster, but I would wish the congregation would be kind, and encourage them, because it's a privilege to have them in the sanctuary today. And if they get a little restless, it's not their fault, it's mine. Come talk to me.

I don't know how many of you were here last Sunday, I don't know what it was for you if you were here last Sunday in the 9:15 service but last Sunday morning, the whole morning was unnerving, for me. Maybe it was having custody of the bullhorn, and how the whistle kept going off when I would bump things. By the way, they've sent it back to where they got it. We had a fire drill last week. Maybe it was the pressure of having to be what was called the Incident Commander, and stand out there by the big tree, when people came up and said, "Well, there's nobody in the basement, there's nobody in the....then you could say, "Well, you can go back in." Maybe that was it. Maybe that was it.

I also had some, to be honest with you, concern that the people in charge of activating the alarm might activate it not when we said, but when we didn't expect it, so I always kind of waited for that and it didn't happen, except for when we thought it would. I think the most difficult thing for me in this service was, we never quite got back together. The 9:15 service, the people left, you all left, you went out of the building, you bought lots of stuff from the youth because they sold out, except I got three jars of jelly which I paid five dollars for, worth every penny, and then you went home. Worship service had a beginning to the service, announcements, call to worship, opening hymn, offering, anthem, bells played, but the 9:15 service was unnerving because after the sermon there was a fire drill and we left the building. We had a beginning but we just left. There was no closing hymn, there was no benediction. We just left the church. People walked out and just kept going. It never ended. There was no closure. There was a beginning to the service, but there was no ending to the service, and I think we've got to have an ending. We've got to have a beginning to worship, and I think we've got to have an ending and a beginning to our lives. I think that's true of each of us, especially on this Memorial weekend when we think about the prelude in our life. Every life has a prelude. It must. That which has gone before us, and we think about that, and we offer thanks. And every life has a postlude. It has to be that which follows after us, and we take time today to remember, and we take time to think about how we will be remembered.

The prelude, we remember them. We pick up our prelude, we pick it up. In every life there is a prelude. For every person, there is that which has gone before us, and we're grateful. We read the names of those who have died since the last time we met on Memorial Sunday last year. We remember the deeds of those who have given so much to the church, and we miss them, and we are indebted to them for what they have done for us, in so many ways. And so the prophet Isaiah, in a troubled time in history, in a time of exile, when the people were pulled out of their land, taken to a strange land, and how do you sing the Lord's song in a strange land, in the land of Babylon, and the prophet Isaiah in chapter 49.. Chapter 49 was not written by the prophet Isaiah, it was written by

someone else. Scholars call it Second Isaiah. I mean, they ought to call it Herb, or something, but Second Isaiah.. someone wanted people to remember the prophet Isaiah and so they wrote the story of Israel's exile and named it Isaiah. It didn't begin with the writer, it began with Isaiah. "And I will give a light to the nations, God said, and my salvation to the ends of the earth" They remembered Isaiah. Scholars tell us, if you look at chapter 55 through 66, that's the end of Isaiah, that's what they call Third Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah, and then someone who wrote in the name of the prophet Isaiah. Second Isaiah, and then someone else who wrote in the name of the prophet Isaiah, Third Isaiah. One Isaiah, two people who wanted us to remember Isaiah. Prelude. Prelude in life, we pick it up, we remember them.

"Why do you have us read the Apostles' Creed today, Chuck?" they said. The Apostles' Creed. Is that a mistake? Are you sure you want us to read the Apostles' Creed? It's in the Sunday bulletin, have you lost your mind? The Apostles' Creed? Several people asked to have the Apostles' Creed every now and then, that could be one reason that we're reading the Apostles' Creed. When I joined the church I had to memorize the Apostles' Creed. How many of you had to memorize the Apostles' Creed, let me see your hands. It's all right to read it every now and then, Memorial Sunday especially, a time to think about the prelude to our faith. Do you remember there was a time in the past when people believed that Jesus was God? That's what the Creed's about. When people believed that Jesus was God, and so a council got together and said, "That's a big mistake. That's a dangerous belief, that Jesus is God, only. If Jesus is not human also, then we can believe in him and not follow him, and that's not good. Then we can worship him and not listen to his words, and that's not good." We can practice bad evangelism. Bad evangelism makes us proselytize, makes us grab other people by the lapels and yank them into our place and make them think the way we think and that's not good, that's bad evangelism. That's control. Evangelism that's good evangelism is not about control. It's about – Bill Coffin explains, good evangelism is simply witnessing to the light that shines in the darkness, and to the love that burns in every heart. Good evangelism is simply saying, "Christ is truth for me, may I share my truth with you?" The love of Christ speaks to the world I know. Would you like to hear what it means to me? Good evangelism lifts up the idea that Jesus was God's son, and Jesus was human, like we are. Christianity is not a creed, it's a lifestyle, and the Apostles' Creed reminded people that Jesus was witness to the light, and we can be as well. That he was born human, just as we are. That he suffered as we do, that he was crucified. It happens to us, that he died, as we will, that he was buried, but he lives. Jesus was human. The creed tells us he lives in us, as we believe in him, the quick and the dead, the resurrection of the body, that's what the Creed's about. That's why it's important to read it on Memorial Day, or every now and then. When we are put in touch with the prelude, that which went before us, then God is real to us.

She brought her fiance home to meet her parents. Her father took the lad into his office alone. Lots of us fathers would have done this. I, for one did. And said to the lad, "So, what are your plans?" And he said, "I'm going to study theology." "Well, how are you going to support my daughter in the manner to which she has become accustomed?" And he said, "I will study hard, and God will provide." "And how is it you're going to be able

to buy her the things that she needs, like a ring, that she richly deserves?" And he said, I will concentrate on my studies, and God will provide for us." And he said, "And children, how do you plan to support my grandchildren?" And he said, "Don't worry, sir, God will provide." The conversation proceeded. This idealistic fool, whose whole life was directed by faith, and later that night, when Mom and Dad were alone, the girl's mother said to her husband, "Well, how did it go? What did you learn about him?" And he said, "He has no job, he has no plans, and he thinks I'm God."

There is that which is prelude. And today we trust it like God. It's our heritage. It's the memory of them, it's how they were human like us, it's how they were frightened as we are frightened at times, and how they lived through the hard times, and grew into wisdom, and how they taught us to trust in the future and have faith. Isaac P____, star athlete, honor student, young man who sent a message to his mother on Mothers' Day, a telephone call, "If I don't make it home, happy Mothers' Day." Died, killed in the service of the country. Best friend didn't think he could speak. "I don't know what I could say, I don't think I can do it." But Isaac was the prelude and Sanford spoke, and everyone who remembered Isaac were better people because of him. The prelude to our lives, we pick it up. It makes us better. We will remember them. We will remember them. Bart Star, quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, two Super Bowls, at the peak of his career most valuable player, not once but twice, just won another Super Bowl. A fan wanted to send him a letter, didn't know how to send it, where to address it, simply put on the envelope, "To the greatest quarterback in the world." Put a stamp on it, put it in the mail box. It got to Wisconsin, got to Green Bay, got to Packer Stadium, sent over to the Stars' house, to Bart Star's house, to the greatest quarterback in the world. Bart Star's wife got the mail that day. She brought the letter to her husband. She said, "Bart, you're never going to believe this. We just got a letter that was addressed to Johnny Unitas."

Prelude in our lives. We will remember, it's like God to us, we pick it up, we think of it and we are grateful for the greatness that precedes us. We will remember them. The question is, how will they remember us? What about what comes after we're gone, how well they remember us. What's the postlude? Others will remember us. We pass it on. Let me tell you about a man named Tom, who thought he had heard from God a call to ministry when fresh out of college, the summer before he entered Duke Divinity School, working at a church in Lewisburg, North Carolina. Newly married, little money, and his car was an old Mercury Bobcat. That was an ugly car to start with, and this was an old one. And that car spent more time at Pete Gable's service station than it did on the road, and every time Pete patched together Tom's car, he told him that he'd settle up with him at the end of the summer. Tom and Pete had a meeting, late in August, and Pete said to Tom, "Now, when you're in your first appointment as a minister in the United Methodist Church, somebody's going to come into your office some day, and they're going to have a broken-down car that they want help fixing. And you remember this summer, and you provide the funds to fix that car and we'll just call it even." And it happened. Tom had tears in his eyes, because he thought of this. It happened, someone walked into his office at Perry Memorial United Methodist Church in Shady Spring, West Virginia. Someone needed help getting the car repaired. Now, Tom doesn't serve a local church. He's been demoted. He's a bishop. Tom Bickerton. He's living his postlude, and he will tell you.

“We are called by grace to be benefactors in turn. We are not called to pay back what we have been freely given. We are called to give in return to pay it forward. We are commissioned as children of God to give freely, no strings attached.” The postlude of our life, the time to pass it on. We’re not always sure what we pass on.

Moses at the end of his life, I assume, I think you can assume it, felt as if he had failed. What was his dream? What was his objective? Going to talk to Pharaoh, “Let my people go.” Take them out, into the Exodus, into the wilderness, you know the story. The stick that turned into a snake. The sea of reeds they walked through. The ten commandments on the mountain, the manna from heaven, all of that. What a leader he was, and the legacy that he would leave as a leader to the promised land, but he died, he never got there. And what did he pass on? What was his postlude? How was he remembered? He probably wouldn’t have guessed it. There never has arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses. He knew God face to face, and he was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that God had sent him to perform. He wanted to be a leader. He was a preacher. Wow. There isn’t much we’re sure of, in life, and sometimes we get it wrong. What we think we pass on.

One hillbilly to another, one of them holding a basket. “What you got in your basket?” “I got fish in my basket.” “If I guess how many fish you got in your basket, will you give me one of them?” “If you guess how many fish I got in my basket, I’ll give you both of them.” “I would guess you have five fish, five fish in your basket.” “No, you missed it by two.”

The postlude, what we pass on. We’re not sure what we’ve got in our basket. We’re not sure about the legacy that we leave. In 1994, the Miss Universe contest, it was Miss Alabama. The question put to her – “If you could live forever, would you, and how, and why? And the answer revealed a kind of existential unclarity. “I would not live forever because we should not live forever, because if we were supposed to live forever, then we would live forever, but we cannot live forever, which is why I would not live forever.” It may be we will not live forever, but some of who we are will live beyond our death. We may not be eternal, but there is a touch of eternity in us, and we pass it on, and that’s the prelude, the postlude.

The woman we called to help us organize our emergency procedures at the church, from Poudre Valley Hospital, she does that there, the woman that we called to organize the emergency procedure, the fire drill we had, Sherry Bartman, the woman who organizes for emergencies, I saw her last week on television. She had a child in the Windmill child care facility. All the children were safe. Apparently the teachers circled up. They got hit with flying glass. The children were taken to a bank, put in a vault where the most valuable things are kept.

Sue Monk Kidd tells the story about her husband Sandy. “Daddy, would you build me a doghouse for Scruffy,” their five-year-old daughter begged. Squeezed the little brown puppy in her arms, gazed at her daddy, a gaze that no father can resist. “Okay, we’ll build a house for Scruffy.” “Now, will it have a roof and a door, and will it have his name on the front, and everything?” she asked “It will have everything,” he assured her, and for

hours Sandy hammered and sawed and put together the lumber into something that at the end resembled a doghouse, and when it was finished it had a door and a roof and a name on the front and everything. Sue said, "I smiled at him, and much later I said to him, 'You're probably the only father in the history of the world who has made a doghouse for a stuffed animal.'" How will we be remembered? "Surely the most," she goes on to say, "endearing of love's attributes, the insistence on being impractical." When we know that what we do in love we pass on, we never know for what it goes or how far. We just pass it on, we just let it go, the love we have for those who follow, they will remember us. The postlude of our lives, and it may look impractical, but love has its own logic.

Today we become conscious of the fact that for our lives to be complete there must be a prelude. We will remember them. We pick it up. And there will be a postlude, if we think about it. They will remember us, we pass it on. We may not pass on what we think we pass on, but they will remember us. And next week, you come back next week, and next week.

Two old people, hill people, West Virginia people, sitting by the fire at night, in a state of marital boredom, and she says, "Pa, I think it's raining. Get up and go out and see if it's raining." And he says, "Ma, why don't we just call in the dog and see if he's wet?" I don't know what that means, exactly, but at times like these, we gotta have a little humor. Come back next week and we'll talk about what we'd like to forget, and we'll see if the dog's wet, and there won't be a fire drill, unless of course we need one.

Now, we have some people joining the church. If there's anybody we don't know about joining the church, would you come forward, but if there's somebody we do know about, would you come forward also.