

Matthew 4:12-25

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

‘Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’ From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

“WHOSE NAME IS ON YOUR BRACELET”

“Corporate Memory”

Rev. Charles Schuster

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Last Saturday night, well it was Sunday morning, actually, it was 3 a.m., and I was thinking about today. I didn't imagine it would rain like this, you know, Memorial Weekend and everything, a holiday weekend. I pondered, who in the congregation would show up? So I made a list of those whose souls were in the most trouble, and so far, I've been exactly right. Although I was a little surprised to find the people from Casper. I hadn't counted on that. In the middle of the night, after pondering this Sunday and who might attend, last Saturday, probably 3:30 in the morning, listening to the radio. A woman called George Norrie about an MIA bracelet she'd been wearing for over 25 years that had a soldier's name on it. Missing in Action, presumed dead. Wanted to give it to the family of the war hero, so they would know he was not forgotten. Wanted to know if there would be any way to track him down, or his family, so that she might return the bracelet with his name.

George Norrie said to her, "I have news. That prisoner of war, the one you think is dead, is alive. Lives with his wife and family. He has written a book. He was in prison with John McCain. In the book he said the only reason he survived the torture, the beatings, the humiliation, the imprisonment, was knowledge that there were people back home who cared, and there were bracelets with his name on them. It's all in the book which he's written about being a POW in Vietnam. Which caused me to ask a question, in a

metaphorical sense, of course. Whose name is on your bracelet? Because that's what Memorial Day is about. Whose name is on your bracelet in gratitude?

Memory can do important things to us. First of all, memory can haunt us. It can become a nightmare. We know that. Judas, for example. We don't know when Jesus said to Judas, "Follow me." We don't have any record he ever did, but Judas followed him. Sort of. Thought he was following someone who would do something about the Romans. Stand up and reach out and give 'em what they deserve, the Romans. But he didn't. So Judas decided he would activate the militant part of Jesus by having him arrested. Thought that might work, but it didn't. And when we think of Judas, we think of a man whose dream became a nightmare. It haunted him.

I think of the Ku Klux Klan. We say, "Pick up your cross." Well, they picked up their cross. If you've ever seen them, they have crosses, but they're not following Jesus. Their crosses are used as symbolism to spread racism and hatred. You know, our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Missouri. Didn't you find it ironic, last Sunday, if you were here, Reverend McFee talking about living in Missouri, what it is to live in Missouri and what kind of people the people from Missouri were, kinda slow, you know, they're good people kind of baseball, watching paint dry. Those are the people of Missouri. That's what she said Sunday morning, and then it happened, Joplin. Most deadly tornado in the history of our country.

This week I came across a story of something that happened in Missouri, March of 2000. After a long court battle, the Missouri Ku Klux Klan was granted permission to participate in that state's Adopt a Highway program. Taxpayer money placed Adopt a Highway signs on this one-mile stretch advertising the Ku Klux Klan. Big sign with that on it. But the Klan withdrew from the project when the State of Missouri designated that particular portion of road, named after civil rights activist Rosa Parks. Those are the people of Missouri. Clever people, smart people, know how to handle bigots kind of people.

A memory can become a nightmare. It can, we know that. Kathleen Maddox grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. She was sixteen when she had her baby. She didn't know exactly who the father was, but she knew that she didn't want this baby tying her down, and so when she got out of the hospital, she just left the baby with relatives and left. On the baby's wristband it said "No name Maddox." Later she married a man who gave the baby a name. His name was Bill. The baby's name became Charles, and all Charles's life he spent chasing after his mother, searching for his family. Charles, Bill's stepson, finally got his family. It was a memory that haunted him. Bill's last name you see was Manson. Charles Manson, you know, Helter Skelter, in prison. His family was a group of psychotic lost souls whom he manipulated into murder. They killed actress Sharon Tate and her unborn baby, and other people, and one of the family members, Lynette Squeaky Fromme almost killed one of our presidents. Sometimes, memory can become a nightmare and it haunts us.

But you know, secondly, memory can become an inspiration and that can save us. The memory the disciples had the day Jesus came to them. "Follow me," he said. They did. Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Jesus, the other women, after Jesus' death on the cross, so inspired by the memory of the risen Christ that to tell them he was still present to them, an inspiration to them. I think of that day in May. I will never forget that day in May. It was Memorial weekend, actually, it was 1962. It was the senior trip. They got all the seniors in Morgantown High School, West Virginia, out of town, which was probably a good thing, went to the nation's capitol. Arlington National Cemetery, I remember the soldier marching so slowly, the mood so somber and quiet, and then from somewhere, we didn't know it was going to happen, out walked John Kennedy, president of the United States. Walked with a bit of a limp. I remember he carried a wreath of flowers and put them on the tomb of No Name, tomb of the Unknown Soldier who died in World War I. Another tomb, a soldier who died in the Korean War. Later there would be a tomb for a soldier who died in Vietnam, that's another story. Wasn't there then. I will never forget the president of the United States, in his pain, bending down to honor the Unknown Soldier and every soldier. All the soldiers who have given their lives. An inspiration.

John Killinger had a memory that became an inspiration. I've met John Killinger, I've read his books. He's written many books. I've heard him preach. He was a teacher, an author taught at Vanderbilt, which is Methodist, you know. In his latest book, *Can the Church be Christian?*, he told us something that he had never revealed before. It's a memory, a tragic memory, but an inspiration. He was twelve years old at the time. His sister was ten. A runaway truck hit their house, rammed that part of the house where his sister slept in her bed, and she died instantly. His mother collapsed in constant tears, had to go to bed, rose only to attend the funeral. They were members of a Baptist church then, but the Baptist church had no minister, so the undertakers made arrangements to have the Methodist pastor do the service.

Brother Rose was his name. Had some kind of speech difficulty. Couldn't pronounce the name Jesus like most people, called him Zesus. Over and over again in the funeral sermon he said, "She has gone to be with Zesus. Your little girl is now safe in the arms of Zesus." John tells us, "I don't know if the was the way he said "Jesus" or what he was saying about love and death, but the effect was amazing. The pain of our loss did not initially subside, but it suddenly became somewhat manageable." The memory of his little sister inspired John Killinger to work toward bringing hope to people, to call all of us to a deepening of our belief, to a broadening of our love, to an understanding of steps beyond the cultural divisions. Whose name is on your bracelet? Whose memory is your inspiration? Whose life gives you the need to follow?

Jean-Paul Sartre said, you know, the genius is not a talent, but it's a way to behave in desperate circumstances. Someone asked Winston Churchill what prepared him most to lead England through the Second World War and he said it was the time he had to repeat a class in grade school. The person who asked the question said, "Do you mean you flunked a grade in grade school?" He said, "I never flunked anything in my life, but I was given a second opportunity to get it right." People like that are an inspiration, and when we think of them, we are inspired by their skill, but more than that, their tenacity. We are

impressed by what they have accomplished but the strength of will that simply won't give up, by the wisdom that they have, to tell us, so wise, but if you listen carefully you begin to realize they have learned more in their failures than they ever learned in their successes. There are people whose memory is our inspiration, and there are people whose memory is our nightmare.

And finally, we can be transformed by remembrance so that they live in us. So that they live. It's the way life is, it's the way life is, you know? Rivers flow into the sea, and the sea gives back the rain, and the rain falls in the river, and the river flows into the sea, and all things are part of all things. Sometimes we see it. It's the way it is. What goes around comes back.

John Ortberg recalls an umpire in a softball league, got stopped by a cop for speeding. He asked for mercy, explained that he never had a ticket in his life. Said he was a good person. Said there was a reason he was driving too fast. Couldn't he forgive the ticket? The officer was stern, said, "You tell it to the judge." When softball season began, the umpire was behind the plate. (By the way, this happened in Colorado.) First batter up, the cop who gave the ticket and the umpire looked at each other, recognized each other. The officer said to the umpire, as he stepped into the batter's box, "So how did you get along with the judge?" And the umpire took off his mask and walked over to the cop and whispered, "You might want to swing at every pitch." That was a gesture to a cop that didn't make the evening news, by the way.

"Follow me," Jesus said, and they did. Andrew and Peter and James and John and Judas and Thomas and Mark and Matthew, they followed. His name was on their wristband. But there's one more you see in the evolution of the Christian faith. There was Paul, who never met Jesus. Took on the faith of Jesus, took it to the Gentile world. What went around comes around to us today. You see it perpetuated itself and he lived through Paul, and he lives through us. It transforms. They live through us.

Rod Willmuth was a guest preacher here, how many years ago? Seven? Some of you may remember. It was the Sunday we had the all-church picnic. Rod Willmuth was a preacher here. Great preacher. Hennepin Avenue in Minnesota, great preacher. He gave us a great sermon that day. I graded that out an A-plus. It was great. And his death was tragic, sad. A really good friend to a lot of us. Rod, after he retired, he took churches between pastors. You know, one leaves and they're waiting a while for another to come? He was actually in Arvada which is where I was before I came here, trying to sort that out. And he was at First Church in Colorado Springs. You know, preachers are pretty scary people, especially to young people. Fred Craddock describes his church growing up. He said, "My recollection of the primary function in my home church growing up was restraint. I mean, we didn't have any laughter, we didn't have any applause, it was real dead. I think the only hymn our church knew was, 'Tis midnight on Olive's brow.' And the only Biblical text I can remember is 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the misery of your Lord.' The preachers in my home church were cadaverous-faced people who would spend long minutes telling us how much we needed to restrain ourselves from a variety of things, and I recall going with a friend to his church, another denomination, it

was the Sunday they were having Communion, the Lord's Supper, and the one presiding at the table said, 'Now is the time to celebrate the last supper, the Lord's Supper.' He used the word 'celebrate.' I had never heard that word used in the church. And when I got home I told my mother, 'They had communion in that church, and they *celebrated* communion,' and she said, 'Well, Son, you do understand, don't you? That's the reason why that church never grew.'"

Rod Willmuth was at First United Church in Colorado Springs when one of the boys in that church got in trouble. It involved a water balloon. Nothing good is coming out of being a teenager with a water balloon in a church. And it didn't. And he was dragged into Reverend Willmuth's office for punishment, sure that he would be kicked out of the church, confident that he had violated one of the Commandments, but he will never forget how Rod Willmuth was to him, and how he made him feel that, yes, he had made a mistake, but he was a good person, and how Reverend Willmuth said, 'You know, I got kicked out of my church when I was about your age, growing up.'" Sam has Rod Willmuth's name on his bracelet and that is important to us because Sam will be here in July, because he's the one he has hired to work with our young people, and you can bet the same open, friendly, forgiving attitude he received will be what he will bring to the youth of our church. It comes around, what goes around.

Memory means they live in us. It continues and transforms. This was in William Barclay's commentary, the Gospel of Mark. Fourth century Rome. Gladiators began to fight. Telemachus was appalled by what he saw. He had to do something, so he climbed over the wall into the arena. The crowd laughed at him. He was in rags. The crowd began to become impatient and 80,000 people began to shout, "Kill him!" The emperor gave thumbs down. The gladiators' swords rose and flashed, and Telemachus prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And Telemachus lay dead, and the crowd was silent. 80,000 people shocked by what happened, and ashamed that they had been party to it. In that embarrassed silence, way up at the top of the arena, one man, disgusted, stood up and walked out, followed by another, followed by another, until the entire arena was empty and the gladiatorial games ended that day, never to be held again. Transformed by the memory of one, and things were never the same.

For you, for me, was it a parent, a teacher or friend or a soldier whose memory has transformed you and me, to whom we dedicate our lives because in some way they live in us, whose name, like Jesus, or Zesus, who said, "Follow me," and we did. Whose name is on your wristband perhaps it was or is one or more of these. Here are the names. We're grateful for what they have been and meant to the church. (Because of uncertainty about the spelling of names, they will have to be added later if desired.)