

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from May 13, 2007

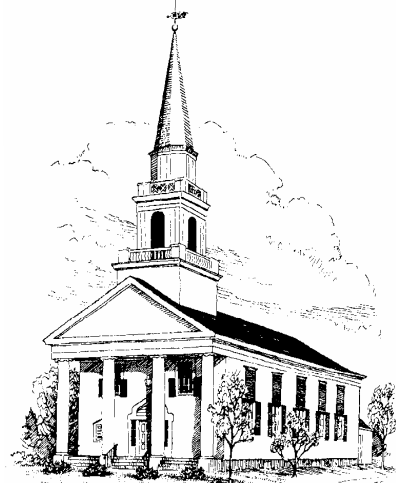
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

### “Reminders”

Scriptures:

Acts 16:9-15

John 14:23-29



I don't know about your house but my house and even my office are full of reminders. Every room of my house has “things” in it that I have collected through the years or been given, that serve as reminders for me. There are reminders of special moments, important events, or of occasions which I want to remember.

There are seashells and pieces of driftwood. There are stones tumbled smooth by the ocean waves. There are photographs of family and friends, both living and dead. There are poems, quotes, and clippings from many places that hang on bulletin boards, on the refrigerator and on the kitchen cabinets. There are mementos from trips I've taken. There are gifts and trinkets from all over the world. There are inherited pieces—dishware and silver pieces, glass vases and furniture—reminders of my mother's home, my grandparents and even my great grandparents. There are “collections” of turtles and carved birds. There are greeting cards and buttons. There are pieces of artwork and just plain silly objects.

I would have to say that I intentionally surround myself with those mementos, gifts, and objects because they serve as reminders for me—reminders of people, events, places and moments in time which make up the fabric of my life. I imagine that most of us have such reminders.

In our lesson from John's Gospel today, we heard Jesus say to the disciples that the Holy Spirit would serve as a reminder to them of all that Jesus had said and been to them. The Holy Spirit, in this case, is the reminder (the memento, if you will) that God provided for us to remember Jesus by.

The amazing part of this memento is that the Holy Spirit is a living, active force that moves among us, continuing to teach and comfort us, continuing to push and prod us, a friend who continues to accompany us on our spiritual journeys. The holy spirit is an active force, an active reminder for our lives.

We can imagine Jesus there in the upper room with his disciples, knowing that he would soon be taken away from them, knowing that the disciples would need all the help they could get to endure the events to come. We can imagine Jesus facing into his own impending death, still tending and caring for the needs of the disciples, assuring them that they would never be alone, affirming that God's presence would always be there for them, reminding them of the presence of the Holy Spirit which always support and comfort them.

During this Eastertide season, in the weeks between Easter and the upcoming celebration of

Pentecost, we look at both how the good news of Jesus Christ spread after his resurrection and we also continue remembering that Jesus was raised from the dead and that Christ is with us still. During these post-Easter weeks, we remember that God's spirit moves in our lives and in our churches and in our world still.

When we get to the celebration of Pentecost in just two more weeks, we will celebrate that amazing fresh outpouring of the Spirit that comes amongst us, that Holy Spirit that guides and strengthens us in all our lives.

We know that the Holy Spirit did not first appear at Pentecost but was a part of this world from the very beginning of time. The Hebrew Scriptures testify to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit from the very first story of creation and throughout all the prophetic and wisdom writings. The Scriptures also testify to a fresh outpouring of the Spirit upon all humanity after Jesus' death and resurrection, in a way that was new.

Our lesson from Acts reminds us that Paul and the other followers of Christ, after Jesus' death, did indeed seek to convert others and worked hard to spread the Good News, empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our reading from Acts, we heard how Paul was inspired by a vision to go to Philippi in Greece where he met a woman named Lydia, and how Paul brought Lydia to a conversion experience, along with her entire household. Paul was already on his second missionary expedition at this time. Paul was working to ever-expand the boundaries of the mission church.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit was present to help Paul and the others—to bring comfort to them, to be their teacher and friend, to be their advocate and counselor as they moved the Good News of Christ's ministry out beyond the narrow confines of the Middle East and into the wider world around the Mediterranean Sea.

Jesus had said that the Holy Spirit would teach and remind us of all that he had said. To remind means to bring to memory. A reminder is something that brings an event or a person or a moment in time to memory again. Memory serves to bring to mind the things of our past, both good and bad memories that make us who we are.

Frederick Buechner in his book called *A Room Called Remember* (p. 11) shares these thoughts about remembering:

*One way or another, we are always remembering ... There is no escaping it even if we want to, or at least no escaping it for long, though God knows there are times when we try to and don't want to remember ...*

*In one sense, the past is dead and gone, never to be repeated, over and done with but, in another sense, it is of course not done with at all or at least not done with us ...*

*Every person we have ever known, every place we have ever seen, everything that has ever happened to us—it all lives and breathes deep in us somewhere whether we like it or not, and sometimes it doesn't take much to bring it back to the surface in bits and pieces ...*

*A scrap of some song that was popular years ago. A book we read as a child. A stretch of road we used to travel. An old photograph, an old letter. There is no telling what trivial thing may do it, and then suddenly there it all is ...*

*Something that happened to us once—and it is there not just as a picture on the*

*wall to stand back from and gaze at but, as a reality, we are so much a part of still and that is still so much a part of us that we feel with something close to its original intensity and freshness what it felt like, say, to fall in love at the age of 16, or to smell the smells and hear the sounds of a house that has long since disappeared, or to laugh till the tears ran down our cheeks with somebody who died more years ago than we can easily count or for whom, in every way that matters, we might as well have died years ago ourselves ... To remember the past is to see that we are here today by grace, that we have survived as a gift.*

Buechner continues:

*“Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen” goes the old spiritual and, of course, nobody knows the trouble we have any of us seen—the hurt, the sadness, the bad mistakes, the crippling losses—but we know it ... We are to remember it ... And the happiness we have seen, too—the precious times, the precious people, the moments in our lives when we were better than we know how to be ... Nobody knows that either, but we know it ... We are to remember it... And then ... We will find, beyond any feelings of joy or regret that, one by one, the memories give rise to a profound and undergirding peace, a sense that in some unfathomable way all is well.*

The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to his disciples in today’s lesson is a gift—a gift of remembrance, a gift that can bring inner peace and freedom from fear for each of us. This is the same Spirit which Jesus sought help from in his own life at his darkest moments. This is not a peace that the world offers us; instead, it is a peace that God offers us. The Holy Spirit is something that each of us can tap into and is something that can never be taken away from us, even if we may lose track of it from time to time.

I hope each of us can recall moments in our life when we knew in some ineffable way that God was present with us, in spite of everything. I hope each of us can remember a time in our life when we had a sense of God’s peace undergirding our life and reminding us that there is a hope beyond all rational understanding.

Howard Thurman wrote (*Meditations of the Heart*):

*Whatever may be the tensions and stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.*

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” This isn’t just the peace which means the absence of trouble; rather, this is the peace which is *everything which makes for our highest good*. (Barclay, p. 171)

The peace of Christ is something which we have been offered and which can never be taken away. We may think of peace as economic security, political and social tranquility, or the absence of physical or emotional pain. We may even think of peace as being “without a problem or a care in the world”, yet that is not the peace Christ promised. We can pretty much assume that problems will always be with us.

Christ’s peace gives us comfort and strength to endure in the midst of our problems. The peace that Jesus pointed to is greater. Christ’s peace is related to the sense of well-being that comes from knowing that we are connected to and guided by an ever-present and loving God.

Memory and expectation, remembering and hoping, remembering and waiting, reminders and mementos ... Let us continue to trust the presence of the Holy Spirit which reminds us of the one whose

life was poured out for us. *To have faith is to remember and wait. And to wait in hope is to have what we hope for already begin to come true in us through our hoping.* (A Room Called Remember, Buechner, p.12)

Let us go out this week to remember and to wait with hope. Let us be open to the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit which sustains and comforts us all. Amen.