

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Marianna, Florida**  
**Sunday, February 5, 2012**  
**Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor**

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

Sermon Title: “Strength through Remembrance”

Sermon Text: Isaiah 40:28-31: Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Are you a theological amnesiac? If I seen his comments earlier this may well have been the title for my sermon this morning. Are you a theological amnesiac? If you had seen such a title in our bulletin this morning or on our bulletin board on Jefferson Street this week, what would have come to your mind? Although I am sure that all of our English scholars here would have no problem with such a title, but I must admit that when I first read his comments I had to go to the dictionary to make sure he was saying what I thought he was saying. The comments were written by The Rev. Dr. William J. Carl III, the President of

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, so maybe he thinks he needs to impress his students with his big words! (*Daily Feast, Year B, page 112*)

Are you a theological amnesiac? When I did check the dictionary I found that what I thought Dr. Carl was saying was true. The word amnesiac is generally not used as commonly as the word amnesia which refers to a loss of memory, or a failure to remember something or someone. Dr. Carl suggests that the words of our Scripture reading this morning remind us that it is easy to become theological amnesiacs, and to fail to do what our call to worship invited us to do, namely, to remember who God is, and all that God has done for us. The danger, of course, of being theological amnesiacs has been highlighted in our prayer of confession that we try to live as God's people in our own strength rather than in the strength God wants to give to all who will wait upon the Lord, and that we fail to remember that however we might feel, however other people may treat us or whatever they may say to us or about us we are loved with a love which is unconditional and unfailing.

As the people of Israel in exile in Babylon felt helpless, hopeless and powerless so the prophet in the words we heard was encouraging them not to be theological amnesiacs but to remember who God is and all that God wants to do for them, and the strength God wants to promise to them. For him strength is to be found in remembrance.

As we come to the Lord's Table and hear the familiar words of Jesus, "This do in remembrance of me," we see that Jesus recognized that even those who had been with him and had heard his preaching and teaching and had seen his miracles ran the danger of becoming theological amnesiacs, and of forgetting all that he had said about who God is, and all that God in love is wanting to do for them. As he prepares to leave them so he shares this meal with them to help them not to become theological amnesiacs.

Today as we come to this table Jesus still invites us to come and to celebrate this meal as a way of remembering him. This is his gift not just to those first disciples but to all who would be his followers that they might not become theological amnesiacs. As our invitation to this Lord's Table will remind us we are invited to come that as we share this meal together we might remember not that we are strong but that we are weak, not that we have any claim on heaven's rewards, but that in our frailty and sin we stand in constant need of heaven's mercy and help. Most of all, we come to remember that in love in Jesus Christ God has come to assure all who will wait upon the Lord of heaven's mercy, heaven's help and heaven's love.

Today as we hear again the encouraging words of the prophet, the words of assurance of the psalmist in our anthem, (*based on Psalm 91*), and the familiar invitation of Jesus to remember him as we come to this table so we are invited not to be theological amnesiacs but to find the strength that God wants to give to us as the people of God as we remember who God is and all that God has done for us.

I do not know what might come to your mind when you hear the word comfort. So often I think we use the word today to speak of taking it easy in a comfortable recliner in which we might be able to relax and maybe even fall asleep as we watch the Super Bowl tonight or a favorite movie, another ball game or television show. As we look at the word comfort, though, we see that it comes originally in Latin from the word "fortis", which means strong. It is the same word that we think about when we speak of forts or fortresses. Comfort then is finding that which will make us strong and protected like forts. It is such an understanding of the word comfort that we find in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism in our Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as it asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The response to that question encourages us not to be theological amnesiacs but to find strength through

remembrance. Our comfort and our strength come as we remember the God whom Jesus Christ has made known to us, and all that in love God has done for us and is wanting to do for us in Jesus Christ. Let us claim that comfort for our own lives again as we affirm our faith using the words based on the Heidelberg Catechism as found in the bulletin. Let us stand and affirm our faith together...

**AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *based on Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism*

Leader:       What is your only comfort in life and in death?

**Unison:**

**That I am not my own but belong, body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of sin and evil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.**