

## Remember Is a Holy Word

### 2 Timothy 1:1–8

The Apostle Paul never wrote about his mother in any of the letters that survive in his name. In our reading, Paul does mention Timothy's grandmother and mother with high praise. Four times in four consecutive verses, Paul used the verb "remember" to recall them and inspire Timothy's faith (2 Timothy 1:3–6). Remember is a holy word.

With the help of a list from Emmy Kegler, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and co-leader of the Queer Grace Community, remember with me some of the many mothers, both named and unnamed, in scripture. Recalling these women can evoke a wide range of feelings.

Remember Sarah and Elizabeth, who each held their newborn child and found it to be simultaneously the greatest gift and the hardest task.

Remember that, due to the stereotype in the ancient world, there were women who never merited a name in scripture because they were unable to bear children. Remember Rahab, Deborah, Joanna, and Phoebe—women whose work outweighed the need to record whether or not they had children.

Remember Jacob and Rachel burying their mother, Dinah, on the way to Bethlehem and being forced to leave her grave behind. Remember Naomi demanding, "Rename me 'bitter,'" after she lost her sons.

Remember the woman at the well, silenced and shunned by divorce. Remember the Syrophenician woman, alone, unsupported, and persistent on behalf of her dying child.

Remember Mary Magdalene, the first preacher of the resurrection and the apostle to the apostles. Remember Mary, a teenage girl, cradling her stomach with wonder, answering the shock of a miracle and the sureness of societal judgment with a simple and determined "Yes."

Remember is a holy word. But it can also be painful, for history repeats itself. Today, many children and adults have suddenly lost their mothers. Many women face miscarriage, infertility, and loneliness. Many are shamed, and societies turn their heartbreak into a weapon against them. Many women

have their rights mocked or pushed aside. Many have their gender and sexuality used against them and the gospel they proclaim.

And also remember the many, many mothers who put their faith into action, who teach and protect their kids, who empower and inspire not only their own but others of all ages. Mothering takes many forms and in many ways.

Returning to our reading, Timothy's mom was named Eunice. In Greek, her name was pronounced yoo-Nike—like the tennis shoe. Nike was the winged goddess of victory, and the prefix eu- means good. What does it mean to have a good victory?

I remember the conflicts in the world, remember the names Putin and Zelensky, Netanyahu and Sinwar. Victory for these men occurs on the battlefield and at any cost. I remember the countless women mourning the dead soldiers and children. It seems hollow to talk of “victory” in light of such suffering. I remember this Bible verse that continues to ring tragically true: “In Ramah, there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more.”

And I also remember how, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus gave us a story that was good enough to eat. He instructed his followers to take the bread and cup “in *remembrance* of me.” Remember is indeed a holy word.

And so, I think of the word remember as the prefix re- and the noun member: re-member, meaning to put separate parts back together. Time and time again, we see this re-member-ing in the Bible, women and men creating communities out of previously disconnected individuals.

This is not to deny that many, like Rachel, are weeping for their children. We can only look forward in faith to the day when death will be no more and God will wipe away every tear from every eye.

And until that day, I think we get glimpses of what shall be.

In his fourth and final use of the word remember, Paul reminds Timothy of “the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” This

laying on of hands can refer to a ceremony of faith or numerous ways we bless others, literally and figuratively holding hands to create community.

My family and I attended a party just yesterday, the day before Mother's Day. The weather was so perfect I remembered e.e. cummings's line "thank you god for most this amazing day."

While parents talked and maybe sipped adult beverages, kids played on the basketball hoop in the driveway and a tree swing in the front yard. There were balloons, snacks, and a big cake.

But this was no birthday party.

After an hour or so, the hosts called everyone to gather beneath a large oak. A piñata was hung, but this piñata was not shaped like an animal. It looked like a ghost with beady eyes and a sinister snarl.

It was a cancer cell.

About two years ago, the child had been diagnosed with leukemia. She began chemotherapy right away. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, her beloved teacher created fun, at-home learning projects. Her classmates sent cards and told jokes on video calls. Neighbors and friends delivered meals and donated to Go Fund Me pages.

She finished her chemo and was declared to be in remission! Just yesterday, we gathered around that piñata and watched as the child's father handed her a baseball bat decorated with festive orange streamers, her favorite color. There was no blindfold. The child fixed her eyes right on the cancer and, with a mighty swing, split it open! Close by, her mom filmed with her phone, simultaneously laughing and crying, crying and laughing as the candy rained down upon the scrambling, shrieking, joyous children.

Yes, remember is a holy word.

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