

**Reflection**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**  
**Memorial Weekend**  
**May 30, 2021**

Here we are with Memorial Day upon us. It's raining. We are still in the midst of a global pandemic. There are wars and continued conflicts. The holiday is a national day, not expressly religious, but as people of faith, I wonder exactly what is it that we are called to remember? And why is it important for us to remember? Each year we are called upon to remember and to honor those who have died in service to this nation and to reflect upon their sacrifice. As a nation we give thanks for those who sacrificed their life for the cause of freedom. On this day we offer prayers of thanksgiving for them and for the nation. But there is more. There are values that this day teaches. American school children memorize the Gettysburg Address—not just as a civics lesson, but memorizing the speech is also an act of identity formation. It is an occasion for young people to connect and internalize the values and aspirations of this country— *“conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”*

But there is more. From a religious point of view, this day is also about *the very act of remembering*. You see—

*The failure of memory is a spiritual danger.*

*The failure of memory results in a failure of faith.*

*The failure of memory erodes the foundation of our relationship with God.*

The very act of remembering is at the core of Holy Scriptures. The recounting of thousands of years of biblical history is full of references to monuments, memorial feasts, and events repeated in rituals— all intended to reinforce the sacred memory of the people

of God. In it are the memories that form identity and connect us to and help us to internalize the values and aspirations of the People of God.

One of humanity's problems is forgetfulness. In countless stories in the Hebrew Scriptures God does not just say, "This is God." Rather, we read, "*This is the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.*" It is a reminder, to a forgetful people (which we all are), of what God has done for us. Without remembering, we have no foundation as a People of God. Scriptures and Liturgies give us a variety of practices to help us remember. The Sabbath. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each exists to remind us of God who creates, redeems, and sustains us each day. The question is, "Will we remember?"

Richella Parham in her book *Mythical Me* describes a way of remembering which she calls "Redemptive Remembering" or *looking at the past with grace*. She suggests that we develop a *redemptive memory* by recalling not only the pain of the past but also the joy. She suggests that we see the problems *and the solutions*. She suggests that we learn to spot the ways that God has provided *even in the midst of difficult situations*. A *redemptive memory* enables us to face the facts of the past as well as our feelings about the past. A *redemptive memory* helps us to embrace the whole experience and comprehend the truth that God always has loved us and will always love us. In short, we are encouraged to look for the "*evidences of grace*" with the goal of recognizing God's help— to spot "*Patterns of provision*." I've never heard it said this way— to spot *Patterns of Provision*. Remembering helps us to recognize, *to spot*, God's presence and help in our everyday struggles and joys. And then, to anticipate God's continuing presence and help in the days ahead. The Psalmist sums up the message:

*Remember the wonderful works that God has done.  
God's great deeds and the judgments the Lord utter,  
O offspring of Abraham, God's servant. (Psalm 105:5)*

When the prophets called upon God's people to remember the works that God had done in the past, this was to prepare them for the future. It is inevitable that those who forget the past will fall into *thanklessness*. It becomes easy to believe that we can make our own way without God and without hope.

The Lord's Supper is a *redemptive memorial*. It does not simply glorify the past but embraces the life's hardest moments—not afraid to remember the whole past.

~We remember the broken body and body of Jesus.

~We remember images of deceit betrayal and cruelty.

~We are confronted with the disquieting fact that we are all capable of striking out against true holiness and goodness.

But *redemptive memorials* do more. They remind us, it teach us, to see the love of God in the midst of trouble.

~A love that will not let us go even the midst of what looks like defeat and even death.

Through *redemptive memorials* we see the promises of God—

~The past and future are made into life-giving realities, even victories brought about by the presence of God in Christ.

A *redemptive memory* helps us to comprehend the truth that God always has loved us and will always love us. In short, we are to look for the “evidences of grace.” We are to look for “*patterns of provision*.”

My granddaughter recently introduced me to a popular county song—called *Rainbows*, sung by Kacey Musgraves. At first it seems rather simple, but now it plays over and over in my head, and I recognize a lesson in faith that this song makes clear— even for a five-year-old child. Here is an excerpt:

*When it rains it pours  
But you didn't even notice it aint raining anymore.  
It's hard to breathe when all you know is the struggle  
of stayin' above the risin' waterline.  
If you could see what I see you'd be blinded by the colors.  
Yellow, red, and orange, and green and at least a million others.  
So tie up your boat, take off your coat and take a look around.  
Cause the sky has finally opened, the rain and wind stopped blowin'  
... Well darlin' I'm just tryin' to tell ya  
that there's always been a rainbow hangin' over your head.  
Let go of your umbrella'  
Yes, there's always been a rainbow hangin' over your head.  
It'll all be alright.*

On this Memorial Day I think of the many chaplains who have accompanied young men and women onto the battlefield. Epiphany Chapel stands as a memorial to them—then and now. The ministry of these chaplains helps teach us to see and to have faith—to recognize even in the hardest of times and in dire circumstances to trust the truth that God always has loved us and will always love us not matter the circumstances. When we remember their service and honor them we are practicing “*redemptive remembering.*” The very act of remembering is sacred. Through it we become thankful people, faithful people, hopeful people. So... *Let go of your umbrella. Take a look around. Yes, there's always been a rainbow hangin' over your head. It'll all be alright.*

AMEN