

“Re-love the Deceased”

Psalm 90:1-12

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Psalm 90:1-12 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Every year we look at the pictures of our fathers, mothers, grandparents, siblings, and children who have gone before us, and the family of God in Christ who lived together in the church. When we look at them again, why do we feel sadness and cry every year?

The Memorial Service for the Called is a special time to praise God the Father who has prepared a heavenly home for us.

At the same time, it is a precious time of worship where we can be comforted by the hope of resurrection in Christ as we remember those who have gone before us to be with God. However, the death of a person, or the death of loved ones, is still a time of loneliness.

The deaths of those close to us, even after their passing, still touch us as if they were close to our feelings and thoughts.

I have chosen today's sermon title as “Loving the Deceased Again”. It seems meaningful to us to remember the deceased who have gone before us.

Some of the deceased we remember on a daily basis and can never forget, while others we have recovered from our grief and loneliness and do not usually remember so much anymore. However, I think it is meaningful for us to remember the deceased, whether it is during the annual memorial service for the called or in our daily lives.

Part One

The first significant thing about remembering the deceased is that we can feel a renewed sense of gratitude toward those who have gone before us and a renewed love for the deceased.

When we actually remember and think about the deceased, it is natural that we may remember their bad points, shortcomings, and hurtful things. However, strangely enough, at the same time or even more than that, we seem to feel sympathy for the pain, effort, kindness, compassion, and hard work of the deceased person, as well as for his or her weakness as a human being and the pain and suffering of living.

Then we are reminded that no one is perfect and that we all have good qualities.

As we age and accumulate more and more experiences, we are able to realize and rediscover those who have gone before us.

My father passed away 11 years ago at the age of 87. Six months before he passed away, he was baptized with the baptism with sprinkling in a room of a restaurant called Kisoji in Adachi-ku, Tokyo, in the presence of Pastor Seino and Pastor Shiraishi, who was the assistant pastor at the time.

When I said, "I want to go to seminary to become a pastor," he said, "You filial son of a bitch! You've turned into a Christ freak!" But at that time, I found my father so calm and gentle that I could never have imagined his previous character.

When I was a child, I hated and was afraid of my father who drank alcohol every day and got angry.

Sometimes he would get drunk and overturn the table, and I would see my mother crying as she cleaned up. I had been thinking, "This bastard, my father, he should die!"

But then one day, my father stopped drinking, not even a drop, and began to show a peaceful demeanor.

When I became a pastor, he even said to me, “What you are doing is something precious that money cannot buy”.

After my father passed away, I rarely recall his rambunctious behavior during his lifetime. Instead, I remember my father’s pain and weakness as a Korean resident in Japan who lived through a storm of discrimination before the war, his big back of 153cm tall that protected our family while risking his life, his warm eyes, his shy and lively smile, and the fact that he loved and cherished my mother more than anyone else. He loved and cherished my wife more than anyone else, loved her with all his heart as if he had found his own daughter whom he could not see even if he wanted to, and was always on my side.

I can’t help but feel sympathy and love for my father’s life and feel sorry for him, to the extent that I think to myself, “Well, if he didn’t drink, he wouldn’t have made it”.

When my father was alive, I could never have imagined that I would have such feelings for him, but after he passed away, I began to love him and miss him very much.

One day, my late father came to me in a dream, and I was so happy that I ran to him and hugged him, crying, “Daddy, I missed you so much”.

Rather than my father’s faults and what was not good about him, I remember his love for his family, his kindness, his dependability, his patience, and his generosity of spirit, which were incomparable to my own, and I think, “He must have been a great man”.

It was truly a “re-love the deceased, re-love my father” thing that happened in my mind.

How about you?

When you dig up your memories of the deceased, you may notice a new and better side of him or her.

You may say, “Oh, yes, that’s right, I’m sorry I didn’t notice that before. I should have been more mindful of that and cherished your pain and suffering. I can’t do anything for you now now, but thank you so much.” I think that when we remember the deceased, we should thank and love them again.

Even after death, we still become husband and wife, even after death, we still become parents and children, even after death, we still become siblings.

Or, oddly enough, we may become husband and wife after death, parent and child after death, or siblings after death.

Moreover, the accumulation of such a process of loving the deceased again seems to make our own humanity, or rather, our depth as human beings, more humble and richer.

We will be pleased with God, trusted by others, be able to be there for others, and grow into people who can be of service to others.

I think that loving God and loving people can be increased by remembering the death of others.

Indeed, the Bible is written in such a way that it encourages us to remember, imitate, and obey those who have already finished their lives on earth and have been taken up to heaven, the way they lived their lives, and the word of God that was spoken through their lives.

It seems to me that the death of a person also plays a key role in reminding us of the existence of God and love of others.

Part Two

The second significant aspect of remembering the deceased is that it reminds us of the most solemn and important fact of human existence: our own death.

I just read Psalm 90. In verse 10, it talks about the fruitlessness of human life.

Psalm 90:10 (PowerPoint)

Moses, the psalmist, was well aware of the harsh reality that “the life of man does not last forever, but is a moment in time when he looks back, and that life is mostly toil”.

I believe that Moses was able to say these things partly because of his own experience. But more than that, I think it was because Moses had witnessed the lives of many others who had died before him and their lives.

Let’s read the verse again in verses 1-6.

Psalm 90:1-6 (PowerPoint)

Even for Moses, the man of God, who believed in the one true God who is in charge of all human life and who created heaven and earth and all things, the transience of human life and human death, which withers and dies like grass, is a serious issue that he himself must face, and not something that is a matter for others.

In fact, the death of someone especially close to us, such as a family member, is a reminder of the most solemn and important fact of our own mortality, which God allows us to experience.

God asks all of us, “How will you accept, understand, and handle your own death with the death of your loved ones?”

The Bible tells us the most important and serious fact.

It is as follows. “Originally, man, being created in the image of God, was ignorant of death. However, as a result of the sin of disobedience and unbelief of the entire human race toward the one true God, the Creator,

death has come to all men. Death no one can escape, and the life leading up to death has become a succession of hardships and hardships.”

What did Moses do in the face of this reality?

Would he have chosen to live as he pleased or to live a nihilistic life, saying “This life is meaningless. I’m going to die anyway?”

No, he did not.

He did not choose such a life, believing in the true God.

Then, what did he do?

Moses chose to believe in God’s love that forgives all sins, to remember God’s eyes on him, and to live with God’s will as his heart, with only his sincere faith that Jesus Christ’s death on the cross was a substitute for my sins.

He knew that after his death, he would be immediately called to the heavenly dwelling God had prepared for him, where he would live forever in the Kingdom of God in intimate communion with the triune Godhead of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

He thought, “How can I live to please God rather than spend my remaining time on earth doing empty and foolish things that neither satisfy me when I see them, nor fill me when I hear them, nor quench the thirst of my soul when I possess them?”

This thought is expressed as a prayer to God in verse 12.

Psalm 90:12 (PowerPoint)

“To count one’s days” means to consider the time one has, to be properly aware of one’s own mortality, to remember that one is a mortal being and that one day one will stand in the presence of God.

Therefore we pray, “Let me gain a heart of wisdom,” so that we can die at any time, so that God will be pleased with the time we have left, and

so that after we die, we can stand before His judgment seat without fear and receive eternal life.

Part Three

In Ecclesiastes 7, we read about the importance of remembering the death of man, and I would like to take a look at it.

Ecclesiastes 7:2, 4 (PowerPoint)

Remembering the death of a person reminds us of the essence, the root, the divine presence, the love for others, and the transience of life and the longing and hope for eternal life that transcends that transience.

Without a proper awareness of death, it is easy to fall into a superficial, ephemeral way of life, thinking only of the immediate.

But if we do this, our lives will end up being empty, without the joy of being pure, without a deep sense of fulfillment, without a sense of spiritual enrichment, and without being pleasing to God.

Jesus once told people earnestly and straightforwardly, “Don’t let that happen to you.”

Luke 21:33-34 (PowerPoint)

Remembering death, death in the presence of God and the end remembering Word of God, protects us from a short-sighted way of life that thinks only of the immediate.

It saves us.

In the monasteries of Europe, there is an old saying that monks used to say to each other every time they passed each other in the garden or in the hallway.

It is called “Memento Mori”.

“Memento mori” is Latin for “remember death”.

In other words, by remembering death, they encouraged each other to cherish the time of life they have left, especially with Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who gave his life on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and rose from the dead, to seek God’s will, to follow it willingly when we know it, to serve others with love, and to live carefully and gratefully.

Remembering death is not something to be feared, or to be meaningless, or to be sentimental, immersed in the feeling of resignation that “I’m going to die anyway”.

Conclusion

We have been thinking about the significance of remembering the deceased, and we hope that through remembering those who preceded us in death, we will also remember our own death and live our remaining time on earth with the wisdom that God gives us.

Remembering those who have gone before us in faith, especially those who believed and walked in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, the Savior whom God sent into the world, and who now live in heaven, looking up to the face of God the Father in unspeakable joy, comfort, and peace, we too, though we will have hardships, will live the remainder of our lives with our hands in Jesus Christ, holding His hand and receiving constant encouragement and wisdom from His words.

Let’s pray.

Benediction : Psalm 90:12