

Forgetful Evangelism

✠ **Freed from bad memories (vv.18-21)**

✠ **Energized by forgiving grace (vv.22-25)**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Lord, dear fellow witnesses of God:

Few words strike such terror into the heart of long-time Christians as the word, “Evangelism.” Most of us have a rather mistaken view that it always means going door-to-door and sharing your faith with strangers. As a child, nothing besides public speaking or singing in front of people scared me so much. Nowadays most Americans see an “evangelist” as someone working the crowd on TV. After a woman in Vadnais Heights reacted negatively to my evangelism visit, her husband told me how her parents were “ripped off” by a “traveling evangelist.” Bad word for her too!

But back away from the stereotypes and see how “evangelism” is really a beautiful word. It’s the one reason we’re still on earth instead of home with God in heaven. We’re here to hear of the Good News, the “ev-angel” of Jesus Christ, then be an “ev-angel” to tell everyone else. Most of us have forgotten the evangelist who first told us – parents, grandparents, pastor, Sunday School teacher, Christian friend. But what we ought never forget is how to practice **Forgetful Evangelism**. No there’s an interesting concept to add purpose and direction to our lives. **Forgetful Evangelism** means we’ve been...

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Strange what the Holy Spirit was talking about when He inspired Isaiah to write: ***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”*** We might think God is telling us to forget all the bad things as when people say they’ve had “closure” and are “moving on” with their life. But read the verses just before our text and the LORD is actually referring to the greatest deliverance in history, second only to what Jesus did when He died on the cross and rose again Easter morning. The one true God drowned the ancient unbelief that said you can get to heaven many different ways. The Egyptians were thought to have the most powerful gods because their army was the best in the world around 1500 B.C. But everyone had this creepy idea that there must be a God above all other gods, someOne who exists outside time and space as we know it. So Pharaoh boldly raced his chariots out into the desert to recapture his economy of several million Hebrew slaves headed for Mount Sinai. His intelligence sources said he had them trapped at the Red Sea. No problem that the water parted what must have been five-miles wide for those millions of men, women and children to cross overnight. And a dry seabed should make for better driving. But then the Egyptian chariot wheels started coming off. And when they tried to turn around, Moses raised his staff, and tons of seawater overwhelmed Pharaoh and his entire army. All drowned.

Such shame on his gods! Such a glorious victory for the LORD God and His Israelites. But why, nearly eight centuries later, did God say, ***“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past”***? The same reason God does not want us WELS members sitting around and reminiscing about “the good old days” when we thought we had plenty of mission dollars. Members who remember the early growth of this congregation do no good to long for the way things used to be. Living in the past blinds us to the new blessings God wants to give: ***“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”***

Married couples feeling the loss of honeymoon bliss, remembering a wonderful Christmas can get very depressed by the winter grind and the same old ruts in their relationship. When you feel as if your life is a handful of sand slipping through your fingers, when it seems you’re lost in a desert surrounded by

dragons and unclean birds of prey all eyeing you for dinner, when your thirsty soul finds no refreshing encouragement in the way people are treating you – then, my fellow evangelists, it’s time to get back to **Forgetful Evangelism**. This is the lifestyle of believers who constantly press forward because in God’s great way of doing things, the best is yet to be. His holy Word will make a highway through that desert of yours. His grace in Word and sacrament will grow your relationship with your spouse so that the tears turn to joy as you both seek His forgiving grace together. God can tame those fire-breathing dragons and destroy fierce dinosaurs at will. No one gets even one more breath or a single second heartbeat unless God gives it. God wants us **Freed from bad memories** and from the shackles of living in the past because He always has something better in mind. By faith in Jesus we are God’s *“people, [His] chosen [ones], the people [God says,] I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”*

✠ Energized by forgiving grace (vv.22-25)

But why does God now launch into a condemning examination of what we’ve done against Him? Where is the “self-esteem” in this? *“You have not called upon me, O Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, O Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense. You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me, or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.”*

The LORD sees how we buy new vacuum cleaners for ourselves and give our worn-out ones to God’s house. His holy light on our offerings shows we are keeping “the fat” for ourselves. We don’t give the best percentage back to God. We wait until Uncle Sam or Minnesota “Momma” has the best, then give God the leftovers. God sees members who did not even pray about the request by our leadership to renew our three-year commitments for the Education Wing and more evangelism. We keep tiring ourselves out with work all week and fun on Saturday, then yawn through worship Sunday morning. God is disgusted with the way we keep His Word to ourselves. *“You have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.”* Shouldn’t He now say, “Go to hell”?

But this is **Forgetful Evangelism**, the unfathomable grace of God that sees the whiteboard of our lives colored black with sin from cradle to the grave. And seeing all the way to the depths of our sin-sick souls, God comes back with this: *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”* It’s not because of anything we’ve done, but totally for His own sake, because He is good to the core of His eternal being. The infinite God forgives and forgets our infinite sins and *“blots them out”* like an eraser on a whiteboard that leaves no trace behind.

Energized by God’s forgiving grace, what do you say to coworkers wondering how trapped miners can be reported alive one day then all but one be dead the next? Were they thanking Jesus one night and blaming Him the next morning? Not the ones who know the Good News of Jesus Christ and trust Him for eternal life. We’re just passing through this place. Here is not where we’re meant to stay. Heaven’s glory awaits. All the believers in Jesus Christ who died in the Twin Towers on 9/11, were waiting at heaven’s gates to welcome the Christians who died in Hurricane Katrina. Hand-in-hand with God they opened their arms to all the dying miners baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Faith in Jesus saves from death for everlasting life with God in heaven.

That’s why we’re **Energized by forgiving grace** for **Forgetful Evangelism**. What else will matter on Judgment Day? Accept God’s judgment on you now as totally forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Then wherever the opportunity arises, speak up and help your neighbor be **Freed from bad memories** and **Energized by forgiving grace**. It may be door-to-door, or just next door. It may be over the airwaves, or on your cell phone. But it’s **Forgetful Evangelism** that prays dangerously for more opportunities to say good things about God. That’s why we’re living. That’s how we live. That’s a gorgeous, glorious lifestyle of the best **Evangelism**. Forget all the rest. Amen.