

## The Remembrance of Christmas Past: Hope from Heartbreak

Isaiah 9: 2, 6, Luke 2:8-14

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Again this morning, and throughout this Advent and Christmas season we are exploring Charles Dicken's classic story, *A Christmas Carol* using resources from the book "The Redemption of Scrooge" by Matt Rawle.

I love the way Dickens describes the voice of the Ghost of Christmas Past: "The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly love, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance." I think this perfectly describe memories – sometimes it seems as if our memories are right next to us but also "at a distance."

**What is your earliest memory?** When you close your eyes and attempt to recall it, does your mind jump from image to image like a poorly edited movie? Maybe what you see is vivid and definitive. Perhaps it feels like a singular perspective that on one else will ever know or see. One of my earliest memories is my fifth birthday – but I'm not sure it is really my memory as we have home movie footage of this particular party and I think the movie has become my memory. That's the funny thing about memories. They feel true and intimate, they help shape our identities and how we see the world, but sometimes our memories are incomplete, blindly subjective and even misleading. This can be especially true of our distant memories, in which we assume that our experiences were the way things were supposed to be, to the point where we can find ourselves replicating our missteps and faults from the past.

Ebenezer Scrooge seem to have forgotten his own story. He is always bitter and exasperated at the people around him, but as the story unfolds we find out this wasn't always the case. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge on a journey to his hometown, and immediately he was filled with joy. His lip quivers, and a single tear falls upon his cheek. Do you have moments that overwhelm you, like that holy moment when you unwrap a forgotten ornament given to you by someone special?

**Author Matt Rawle writes of his church hosting a Christmas healing service, often times called a "Blue Christmas" service where they invited**

those for whom the holiday season is difficult, to join them for prayer, meditation, and Holy Communion. During the time of sharing, it was hard not to openly weep from the stories that were told. One woman talked about how her father had died on Christmas morning. Another cried out, "I wish my son could forgive me." Another remembered how lonely he was now that his wife was gone. It was a beautiful lament. They shared in each other's grief. When they broke bread around the communion table, Matt mentioned how our salvation is brought about not through wholeness, but through a broken body. Christ died and was raised, not to prevent us from grieving, but so that our brokenness would be redeemed, our faults would not define us, and our sadness would not be the end of the story.

The next morning, the woman who had wept over her father's death called Matt to tell him that she had had a profound sense of peace during the service. It's not that her sadness was gone, but when they had shared the bread and the cup she felt she had gained permission to once again be happy during Christmas. She felt that her sadness was a means of remembering and honoring her father. In other words, being happy during Christmas felt offensive to her memory, but knowing that brokenness can be redeemed offered her a holy moment of forgiving herself.

Could it be that Scrooge's inability to be merry was a way of honoring his heartbreak, ensuring that the pain he remembered was not diminished or understood as unimportant? It seems that the gospel teaches us that we honor our pain, not by holding on to it, but by sharing it and carrying it with each other. In other words, Christ died and rose again. **Christ was laid in the tomb, but that is not where he stayed.** Suffering is certainly part of the story, but it is neither where the story lingers nor ends.

Our memories are not always accurate. Sometimes our visions of the past are incomplete or misleading, emphasizing sadness while forgetting joy. When we gather for worship around the communion table as we do today, we are called to remember Christ with the words, "Do this in remembrance of me" Luke 22:19. Jesus knows our faults and our faulty memories doesn't mean we will be perfect and always filled with happiness, but it does mean that through Christ we will remember that we have been redeemed and will be transformed to accept and share love with God and our neighbor. I've

heard love described as someone who knows you well and loves you anyway, and Christ indeed loves us, unconditionally.

When Scrooge is visiting scenes of his past he goes to **a Christmas party** hosted by his employer, Mr. Fezziwig and is deeply moved by Mr. Fezziwig's generosity to his workers and Scrooge says about him, "The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune." This moment is a foreshadowing of Scrooge's redemption because it is rather shocking to hear him admit that money is not the source of happiness. In the same way that Scrooge laments missing an opportunity to speak with the young caroler at his door earlier in the evening and give him a monetary gift, he now desires to speak with his lowly clerk, Bob Cratchit, realizing he has placed money above Bob as a person and friend.

The Ghost of Christmas Past took Scrooge on a journey through his memories, the way you and I might flip through a photo album or scroll through our Facebook news feed. Some snapshots of Scrooge's past were joyful, such as the memory of his old boss, Mr. Fezziwig; while others reminded him of things he would rather forget.

Near the end of his journey to the past, he relives a time when he and his sweetheart, Belle, discovered there was no longer any connection between them and their relationship had failed. When Scrooge relives this memory it is painful and while he never regained Belle's love he is eventually moved to compassion towards those who know the pain of brokenness.

Do you know heartache? Do you have painful memories? How can God transform those memories into future blessings for you and for others?

We celebrate Advent every year so that we can mold and shape our **desire for presents** under the tree into a desire for the Christ who was placed on the tree. This time of waiting tempers our souls so that we might slow down enough to see God's blessings around us, to hear the cry of those in need, to reach out hands to embrace those in need of love, and to hunger and thirst for justice and kindness. During Christmas everything changes, and God invites us to slow down so that we might notice the change happening within our very own souls.

**The miracle has just begun in YOU for the sake of the world...God bless us every one!**

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In today's first scripture, the prophet tells of the hope and light that Jesus brings to the world.

**Isaiah 9:2,6**  
**Common English Bible**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.

A child is born to us, a son is given to us,  
and authority will be on his shoulders.  
He will be named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal One, Prince of Peace.

Our second scripture is the announcement to shepherds about Jesus' birth.

**Luke 2:8-14**  
**Common English Bible**

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors."

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of this holy word.