

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David Powers
Sunday, October 4, 2026

Before we hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your pews. Let's take a couple of deep breaths together. Let's take a deep breath in.

Breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in.

And breathe it out slowly.

Breathe in God's mercies.

And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments, that you would by your power quiet any voice within us by your own, that we might hear your word for us this day and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Scripture that will ground our study of Zakar this morning comes from Deuteronomy, chapter 8. We're going to read verses 7- 20 together. These are Moses's words to the people of Israel.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in the valleys and the hills. A land of wheat and barley, of vine and fig trees and pomegranates. A land of olive oil and honey. A land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, his statutes that I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness and arid wasteland, with poisonous snakes and scorpions. God made water flow for you from flint rock. God fed you in the wilderness with mana that your ancestors did not know to humble you and to test you and in the end to do you good. So do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand has gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is God who gives you power to get wealth, so that God may confirm his covenant that he swore to

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your ancestors, as he is doing today. If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord is destroying before you, so shall you perish because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

I invited you last week as I was preaching on Ruach to pay attention. If you remember, I said that as I've wrestled with each of these words, studying them throughout these last four weeks, God has been drawing them into my consciousness throughout the week. So last week I talked about how with Ruach, breath, and spirit, it seemed like everything I read and every conversation I had had something to do with breath and spirit, inviting me to pause and take deep breaths or inviting me to pay attention and be attuned to the working of the Holy Spirit. I was remembering that this Tuesday when I was starting to study this word, Zakar. I read in my devotional this quote from Natalie Goldberg. This is the devotional I shared with y'all a couple weeks ago. Heartsteps by Julia Cameron. Miss Goldberg says this. "Over and over, we have to go back to the beginning. We should not be ashamed of this. It is good. It is like drinking water. Over and over. We have to go back to the beginning." We have to—with a little bit of liberty—Zakar, remember. It's what remembering is. It's returning back to the beginning. It's what we're invited to this day in the text from Deuteronomy.

When I think about remembering and the call to do it, I'm reminded of one of my guest rooms. Upstairs, in the front of my home, there's this guest room that is filled with all of the things that a middle-aged man can't have on display in the rest of his home. So, it's, uh, it's footballs and it's memorabilia of all sorts of different kinds, right? They've all been drawn into this one room, which means that when I go into that room, I am kind of transported back. It's a room of memory. So, on one of the shelves on the side of that bedroom, there's a foam tomahawk. I got it when my grandfather took me to see the Braves playoff game against the Pirates in 1991 when they went from worst to first. He drove me down from Greenville, and he bought us tickets absolutely as far away from home plate as humanly possible. Right. But he got me this foam tomahawk, and it survived all these years later. Every time I look at it, I think of my grandfather. There's this tin sitting perched on one of the bookshelves as well. I've actually used it as an illustration before, but it has an etching of my mother's name, Jean Bedez, on the top of it. It was her Girl Scout tin. So, you can unscrew one little bolt, and it turns around and opens up, and there's a bowl and a cup and silverware from when she was a Girl Scout. I look upon that and I think of her. There's a hat that my grandfather, my father's father wore during World War II, and it's perched there. Found it in his basement when we were cleaning out his home. Every time I look at it, I think about him, and I think specifically about his service, and I think more specifically about a wound that he showed me only when we were swimming together in some lakes up there outside of Boston. A wound from one armpit to another. He was wounded in

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battle in North Africa. The bullet made its way through him without touching any vital organs. And so he didn't show that wound very often. But every time I look at that hat, I think about the gift of his life and his service.

There's also a shelf in that room that holds a couple of things that are dear to me. The shelf actually holds this little box. This is a memory box for me. I didn't actually know that that's what it was going to become when I took it from my childhood home, but that's what it's become. It's a box full of memories. There's this shell. Actually, this is the newest memory in this box. This is from when I hiked the Camino. The shell is kind of the sign of the Camino in Spain and Portugal. There's a picture deep in this box of my friend Tim Bright. He was my best friend growing up. He passed away of cancer at the age of 31. When I open this box and I go through its contents, I'm reminded of joyful times and painful times. There's a ticket in here. It's actually a backstage pass to Travis Tritt at the Spartanburg Memorial Coliseum. Okay. Or Auditorium, excuse me, and it's signed by Travis Tritt. All right. I think about the time that we had singing together. There's on the shelf in that room a large pompom and booklet. I went into the room last night after I watched my football team get absolutely trounced at home at night. I'm a Clemson fan, and so (that sounded like confession.) And so I went into the room last night, and I sat down by candle light, and I thumbed through some national championship souvenirs that I had, remembering the good old days, right? It's a room full of memories. And I go into that place from time to time, not just to straighten up and make sure it's comfortable for guests, although I do that. But sometimes I go into that place, and I just sit in a little recliner there, and I peer upon those things, those momentos, those things that hold such memory, in that place. The power of the memories held in that room is that they center me down back into my story. Depending on how I'm feeling, they actually re-member me. They put me back together. If I'm in a place of deep sadness or grief, I can go into that room, and I can remember the ways that God has been faithful in difficult times. If I'm in a place of celebration, I can go into that room, and it could be amplified, redoubled by other times of celebration. Memories put me back together. The funny ones, the painful ones, the hopeful ones. They remind me of my place in the story. They remind me that God is good, that God has been good, and that God will be good. They also remind me, even in their difficulty and pain and grief, they remind me that God has something beautiful and good in store for me and indeed for the world. That's actually the place where the people of God find themselves when Moses begins to encourage them in Deuteronomy 8. They are going to a beautiful and good place, a place long promised to them. And he describes it in beautiful detail. It's going to be a good land, Moses says. There's going to be flowing streams, and in hills and valleys, there's going to be water that bubbles up from underneath. You look upon a field, it will be filled with wheat and barley. Another field will be filled with vineyards, and others fig trees and pomegranates. It's a land full of olive oil and honey. This is a place that is good for the people of God. They are going to have so much bread they'll never have to be worried about it running out.

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And on the precipice of making that move into that good place, Moses has instruction for them. He says to them, Zakar, remember. In verse 18, "but remember the Lord your God." Every time you see remember in this text, it is Zakar. Moses gives them this encouragement because Moses knows his people. He's been traveling with them for a long time, and he knows that like us, they have short memories. And sometimes that's good if you're in the midst of a wilderness. And other times it's not so good, because when we have short memories, we forget our place in the story. Moses has been with them. He has heard them forget over and over the place that they are in their story. He's heard their grumblings in the wilderness. They get bread and it satisfies them for a while, and then they get ornery. They get other sustenance in that place in the wilderness, but they start to complain. It's almost like they've forgotten in the wilderness that they are there because God has delivered them from bondage, from slavery, from Mitzrayim.

And he wants the people as they move into this good place to value the journey that has brought them into the promised land. He wants them to remember the difficulty and the turmoil. But more so than that, he mostly wants them to remember the grace and the power of their God, who has freed them from bondage, led them through wilderness, and is preparing a good and promised place for them. What he knows is that it is easy to forget, especially when you get comfortable. When you have no fear of scarcity. When every field you look upon is filled with all sorts of good things. When you go from living in a field or tents to having stone laid on stone and a roof over your head, it gets real comfortable. And when we get real comfortable, we experience something of a...a spiritual amnesia

On some level, we forget who it was who has brought us into that place. So he says to them, "Remember the Lord your God." Because he knows that the comfort that they are about to experience might levy upon them spiritual amnesia. Forgetting.

The danger, of course, that Moses saw for the people is that when we forget, when we neglect to remember the story, we end up untethered, unanchored to the fullness of not only our story but God's work in our story. We end up being untethered, unanchored from our full identity. And that is we are not simply the people that we are this morning sitting in the pews or in our choir loft. We are a collection of stories of God's faithfulness over decades, over lifetimes. And so Moses hopes for the people that they will remember. He wants them to Zakar so that they will always be connected to the larger story. And the larger story is this—that they worship a God who is faithful, and they worship a God who is powerful, and they worship a God who liberates not simply from Mitzrayim, the physical place, but from every bondage that befalls them.

He knows that comfort can lead to resistance to remembering or forgetting. But he also knows that there's another sort of forgetting that happens. And maybe you've experienced this in your life. One of the ways that we forget our story is we mythologize it. Most specifically, we mythologize our past. I've sat with people who talk about the life that they have lived, and I'm

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guilty of this too. They remember it in much more glowing terms than it actually was. We don't just do that personally because sometimes that's a defense mechanism that can be okay for survival, I guess, but we do it corporately as well. Moses wasn't just talking to individual people entering the promised land. He was talking to a group of people who had collective memory. He wanted the community to remember their enslavement, not mythologize the wilderness that they have been in. Sometimes we do that as a community as well. We talk about the ways that we've acted in the past, let's say, as Idlewild Presbyterian Church: and we talk about the good old days and how we acted in good and upright and faithful ways when the story is much more complicated. We've discovered that in some of our racial reconciliation work. Our story is a lot more complicated.

That's a different kind of forgetting, willful even. We don't always like to be taken back to those places of memory because often that means we have to deal with and confront complexity and discomfort. It's the same in our lives as well. We don't want to look back on that season of marriage because it was really really difficult for all sorts of different reasons or parenting or work...whatever it is. The danger, of course, is when we forget, we end up untethered, unanchored to our full story, to our full identity as well. And so we have to listen to Moses's call to not forget either in the midst of all the comforts of our world that we experience.

But the beautiful thing about those who call upon the name of Jesus is that we don't simply have the words of Moses to call us to Zakar, to remember. We have, especially on this Sunday, a table, a table which is certainly marked with an imperative. "Do this in remembrance of me." The doing, of course, is the celebrating again of a Passover meal a couple thousand years ago that Jesus held with his friends. A Passover meal, which was already a meal of remembrance for the Hebrew people. They have all sorts of festivals and celebrations to help them remember. At Passover meal. Jesus gathered with his friends in an upper room, and they sat, you might imagine, crisscross applesauce around a table, and they ate and they drank and they told stories.

And somewhere in the middle of that meal, Jesus took some bread, and he gave thanks aloud to God for it, and he broke it and he said, "Take and eat, and every time you eat of this, remember me." And sometime later, he took a cup and he poured it and he said, "Take and drink. This is my body and my blood. This is the blood of the new covenant. Every time you drink of it, remember me."

Jesus doesn't use the word Zakar, but that's what he means. He's a good Hebrew, good rabbi. He creates for the people and for us now a meal of remembrance. It is Zakar in the shape of grain and grape.

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To me, this table is a bit like a guest room full of memories. It represents grace and sacrifice, which means it represents love and grief.

And I wonder, I wonder if our invitation this morning isn't to come to the table with a different posture today. I wonder if perhaps this table can be for you this day, a place that grounds you back into the fullness of your story and the parts of your story that are really difficult and grievous. The parts of your story that are really painful and also the parts of your story where God has been so faithful, where God has brought new life out of death. I wonder if you might as you approach the servers this morning, as they're about to serve you the meal, that you might spend some time just on your brief walk remembering that you have been forgiven, that you have been freed, that you are loved. I wonder if the table might be a place where you can trust with all your being that wherever you find yourself this morning, God is bringing you into a place of hope and promise because that's what God was doing to the people of Israel so long ago. I wonder also if Moses's word, an encouragement to Zakar, might...might also be an invitation for you this afternoon. It's beautiful. It's sunny outside, so maybe you wait till this evening. But I wonder if there's a guest room of sorts in your house or your abode or maybe a corner of your home where you have some memories stored. I wonder if the invitation to Zakar might be to root yourself back down into your story today, to open up your memory box to...I can guarantee nobody has a backstage Travis Tritt pass in theirs. But there might be some memories that can ground you back into moments of joy and celebration. And maybe, maybe, maybe, as you're spending some time Zakaring, you might be rooted back into your story, you might be reminded that you are a part of a great and wide story of the living God. As you come to the table this morning, I hope you might remember that the power of the memories held at the table, they have the power to center you down into God's story. So I pray that they might put you back together, re-member you, the funny parts, the painful parts, and the hopeful parts. I pray that as we celebrate this World Communion Sunday, they might remind you and remind us that God is good and that God will be good. And ultimately, God has something beautiful and good in store for you and God's world. So may we Zakar today. May we Zakar that we are part of God's story of grace and new life, a larger story than we could ever possibly imagine. May we hear the words of Moses and later of Jesus and remember, beloved. Remember.

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving one you have been with us in every part of our story, and we are apt to forget. We become so comfortable in the place where you have brought us that we forget that you have brought us here. So amongst the olive groves and fig trees and honey, might you help us to remember the difficult parts of our journey, the joyful parts of our journey, and your place in every season of our lives. And in our remembering, God, may we be centered back down into your deep and wide story of liberation and of hope. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. And all God's people say together, "Amen."