

Exodus 20:21-26

“Remember”

To all of our visitors, former members and relatives, Welcome Home! Homecoming is that Sunday when we welcome the friends and home folks back to church. It is that important Sunday when we remember and give thanks to God for our loved ones and friends who have passed away this year. As I thought about homecoming this week it has occurred to me Home coming is about remembering. Home coming is about remembering what has happened at this church in the past; and reconnecting with those who have come home. One of the many things the Bible is good for is helping us to remember. It is a part of the Passover festival that the young people of the house would retell the story of the Exodus and how God saved God’s people from the Egyptians by bringing them through the Red Sea. Most of Israel’s festival days had an element of remembering and nostalgia. This morning’s passage helps to set the precedent for all the generations from that day to this one.

“An Altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burn offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; **in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you**” (Exodus 20:24).  
*emphasis mine*

Now I have only been serving as a pastor for going on eight years, but in that short time I have learned this. God’s people have very long memories. God’s people remember when this building was built and paid for within five years. God’s people can remember how a previous pastor had a vision to build the Fellowship Hut and then closed the doors and took up pledges until they had enough money to pay for it. By the way, we will be having lunch in the Hut after church today. Please plan to stay and eat.

God’s people will refer to you by your maiden name even when you’ve been married for 50 years. That’s the story for many of the people we have remembered by lighting candles this morning.

When I first looked at this morning’s passage I thought it was about altars and where to offer sacrifices, but the longer I spent with the text the more God showed me this passage is not about tables and offerings. This passage is about God. This passage is about keeping God first and foremost and how we remember to put God first. (pause) **“in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you”** My sisters and brothers, how do we remember what God has done? When life is hard and the storms of life seem to rage, how do we remember what God has done? How do we keep from only focusing on what is wrong in our lives from day to day? Do y’all know people who gloss over the good thing that has just happened so they can focus on the hurt they just suffered? Do y’all know people who have hurt themselves by refusing to see the light of what their friends are trying to do to help them? Have any of y’all met good people who have become hurtful people – even bullies because they couldn’t let go of the memory of the hurt they have experienced? “This is the opposite of what God is saying this morning. In every place God causes God’s name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” If you are struggling with the memory of a past hurt this morning, maybe even a past hurt in this place please, please take a moment to consider what is happening here at Central, and what has been happening here at Central in the last year or two.

Over the last two years God has moved Central to have an increased focus on outreach. Central has made a larger commitment to the South Davidson Family Resource Center. In 2017 we began partnering with SDFRC in a whole new way. We have turned over offering financial support for things like power bills to SDFRC, and begun supporting those efforts financially. When God moved SDFRC to start being open one night a month

Central heard God's call and began sending volunteers to work those nights. We started a garden where we provide fresh produce for SDFRC's food pantry so the poor and working poor can receive good food to find the strength to get back up on their feet again. Last December we collected over 200 blankets so those living in homes with little to no heat could stay warm. This summer God moved Central to participate in the South Davidson School system's Sneakerdoodle program where we donated 46 pairs of shoes and collected \$750 so the school could purchase shoes as needed for students coming into the elementary school. While collecting money for shoes God revealed to our church there are an alarming number of students in this area going to school without socks or underwear. So the UMW and Central's youth will be gathering socks in October and calling it Socktober.

For the last two years God has been working on the ways Central nurtures discipleship and wellbeing within the walls of our church as well. Our lunch and learns have pulled in the biggest crowds ever for topics like depression and loneliness. The ladies of the UMW have been making prayer blankets for the sick and dying. We have increased the regularity of our visits out to Mt. Vista. Last year we hosted our Community Summer Bash and this year we will be hosting an Ice Cream social on September 9<sup>th</sup>. If any of y'all are in the area you are more than welcome to attend. Central's church staff have begun sending out post cards to those of y'all who are still members but don't attend regularly. We are also sending out post cards to our shut ins as a way to let them know God still loves them and so do we.

God has been moving Central to do a better job of witnessing out in the community. We have continued to be a strong presence at the Halloween Street Treat and all of the town events. This past summer we participated in a community VBS with the rest of the United Methodist Church's in town. The VBS was held in Harrison Park, and was very well organized and set up. The kids had a great time learning about how God calls us all to be fishers of men, and I think the volunteers had a good time working together as well.

My sisters and brothers God is at work all the time, doing things and moving in our lives in ways that need to be remembered. Central would just be a country club in a pretty building if God's Holy Spirit was not at work in this place, moving the people of this congregation to be fruitful for God's Kingdom. The stuff we do for the community is important. Without a doubt, being the hands and feet of Christ is important. However, giving God the credit for moving us to do it in the first place is even more important. When God hands this command about altars and idols to Moses it is not about altars and idols. This passage is about keeping our eye on the prize and continuing to strain for the upward call of God in Jesus Christ. It's true, faith without works is dead, but my brothers and sisters if we are just doing works for the sake of saying we are a church then all we are doing is showing off. Faith without works is dead. Works without faith is showing off. The reason all of the things Central has been doing over the last two years is successful is because God has been at work making them fruitful. God has been at work making this church, this building, but more importantly the people who worship here a place to be noticed. Why should people notice this church? This church should be noticed and remembered because Central UMC is a place where God is heard and the people listen to God.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
Amen