

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“DON’T FORGET TO REMEMBER”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 11: 28-30

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 17, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Matthew 11: 28-30

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Don’t Forget to Remember

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

My wife, Martha Ann, and I are big fans of the Holderness Family. If you're not familiar with them, Penn and Kim Holderness, and sometimes their children, Lola and Penn Charles, create humorous music parodies that are lighthearted, creative, and mostly family-centered. Martha Ann recently told me about one called *The Dumpster Song*. It's all about the joy that overtakes the Holderness household when, due to an unexpected home renovation, a dumpster is delivered to their driveway.

They're elated, not because renovations are fun (they aren't), but because the dumpster gives them permission to finally get rid of things—old clutter, broken furniture, outgrown toys—the sort of stuff that collects in the corners of our homes and lives. As the family sings and joyfully tosses things out, the video proves to be both funny and strangely relatable.

There really are seasons when decluttering feels necessary. Spring cleaning, for example, or the start of a new school year, a move, or even a personal crisis. There are times when we crave a fresh start, a clean slate, a sense of order in what sometimes feels like a chaotic world, and that's not a bad thing.

But this morning, I want to offer a slightly countercultural perspective. While there are things in our lives worth tossing into the dumpster, there are other things—core truths, deep promises, and sacred memories—that we must never discard. There are some things worth holding onto with all our strength; eternal truths that we dare not forget, because they function as anchors in the storms of life, a kind of faithful bedrock upon which our lives can be built.

This morning, we invoked God's blessings upon our children as part of our annual “Blessing of the Backpacks,” a sweet tradition that bears witness to our natural propensity to look ahead to a new school year, perhaps new routines or new beginnings. But as we look ahead, let us not forget to hold fast to certain lessons of our faith, certain spiritual principles that we must never forget to remember.

This morning, and in the midst of this world of ours that often invites us to simplify and streamline and focus on what's ahead, let us consider three simple spiritual truths which are foundational for a life of faith.

The first truth is this: God's ways are not our ways, but they are good! _____ read for us this morning from the prophet Isaiah. Many of the people in antiquity who were hearing Isaiah's words were in exile, or returning from exile, and, as a people, they had forgotten how to hope. Listen again to what Isaiah said: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).

What a wonderful reminder—not only of God's transcendence but also of God's trustworthiness. God is not just some bigger version of us. God's perspective is different, His timing is different, His purposes are different, and they stretch far beyond what we can see in our present circumstances. And goodness knows, even what we do see can sometimes be confusing.

On an earlier occasion, Isaiah offered a different word—a warning, really: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil." That was Isaiah's way of reminding us that danger is not always out in the open; it is sometimes cloaked in goodness. In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio put it like this: "In religion, what dammed error, but some sober brow will bless it and approve it with a text, hiding the grossness with fair ornament?"

Or think of that ancient story of the Trojan Horse. What looked like a gift of peace was, in fact, a trick, a disguise, a secret weapon that housed Greek soldiers, and which led to the city of Troy being conquered. There are seemingly noble causes out there in the world today that would seek to co-opt God into their narrative. They say things like, "A Christian would not and could not believe this way." Or they say, "The only Christian response is this or that." It is enough to cause even the most discerning person to become confused, but God is not the author of confusion!

And we also know, from elsewhere in the Scriptures, that God works in and through all things, and that includes those people and places and situations which run antithetical to God. They do not have the last word, for we know and do believe that God is in the business of redeeming His creation and fashioning it for the benefit of His good purposes—and we're a part of that!

A few weeks ago, we sang the hymn, *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*, which was written by George Matheson. In one of the stanzas, he speaks of "tracing the rainbow through the rain," a line made all the more powerful by the fact that Matheson was blind when he wrote it. Matheson literally could not see the rainbow, but he believed it was there, and he trusted that behind the rain, there was still color and light—and covenant!

The Apostle Paul put it like this: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Notice Paul doesn't say that all things are good. He says God works in all things, which means that God works amidst heartache and loss and illness and disappointment—works in all those things and more, to bring about a deeper good, a good that we may never be able to see!

Think about the Biblical story of Joseph. He was sold by his brothers, falsely accused, essentially forgotten in prison; and yet, at the end of his story, he looks at the people who betrayed him and says: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (cf. Genesis 50:20). That's the first truth we must remember—that God's providence doesn't always follow the plotline we expect, but it is trustworthy. Our calling is not necessarily to understand, but it is to trust!

The second truth is this: we can't fight God and win, but we can surrender and live! Which is to say that we cannot manipulate God. We can't bargain with God, or control God, or outsmart God. And if we try, we'll find ourselves exhausted!

I used to box with our son Harrison when he was little. We'd put on the gloves, and he'd give it everything he had. I'd let him land a few punches, just enough for him to think he had the upper hand. But let's be honest, he was never going to win when he was two, three, or four years old. Now that he's almost 25, I'm not so sure!

But imagine if I'd signed Harrison up to fight the heavyweight world champion at the time—that would be absurd, right? Well, we look even more ridiculous when we try to go toe-to-toe with God! Saul of Tarsus tried to do that. Saul, we would do well to recall, was the name of the Apostle Paul before his conversion. Saul was brilliant, zealous, and convinced that his mission to destroy the early church was righteous. But then God knocked him off his high horse while he was traveling on the road to Damascus, and God asked him a question: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

In that moment, Saul had to unlearn his confidence in himself and learn instead to trust in God's grace. Sometime later, the Apostle Paul would write this: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). You see, spiritual maturity isn't about becoming strong enough to carry the weight of the world. It's about becoming honest enough to lay it down at the feet of Jesus.

Martin Luther once said, "We are all mere beggars showing other beggars where to find bread." That's the humility that sets us free to love. We don't earn God's favor by being perfect or put-together. We receive it as a gift and we share it as grace—which leads me to the third truth, one which we may most need to hear today: Jesus still offers rest for the weary!

In our NT Lesson from Matthew chapter 11, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (cf. Matthew 11:28). Notice that Jesus didn't say: "I'll fix all your problems." He didn't say: "I'll give you a break when you've earned it." He simply said: "Come...I will give you rest."

Jesus first spoke those words to people crushed under the weight of religion. They faced rules without grace, law without love. They had been told time and time again that they needed to do more, to be more, to try harder. But Jesus offered them, and us, something much better—not a pause, but a peace that runs deep in our souls!

This is what John Calvin imagines as "the peace that surpasses understanding." For Calvin, it was never a peace dependent upon our ever-changing circumstances. No! For Calvin, ours is a peace wholly dependent upon the unchanging character of God.

There's an old story about a city in the Holy Land called Shechem. It has been said that beneath its streets are deep underground rivers. During the day, with all the noise of the market, you'd never know they were there, but at night, when the noise dies down, if you listen closely, you can hear the water flowing beneath the stone.

Is that not akin to what Christ offers us? Not a surface-level noise, not a quick fix, but a deep and abiding river of grace, a river that flows even when we can't see it! Such is the gift of the Holy Spirit that wells up inside of us, yet sometimes in the busyness of life, we can't hear it. We need to be still.

Today, as we bless backpacks, we are doing more than praying over school supplies. We are praying for our children—their curiosity, their courage, their friendships, their faith. We are praying for their parents and teachers—for patience, wisdom, and strength. We are also praying for ourselves, that we too would remember what matters most. Because, let's face it, even the best-organized backpacks get heavy, as do our hearts!

Tomorrow, the Colby Organ Company will begin the process of reassembling our organ, which has been undergoing a comprehensive refurbishment this summer. It may not be ready next Sunday, but it should be ready the following Sunday. Our organ—an instrument of memory, worship, and harmony—perhaps can serve

as a reminder that we would do well to reinstall in our lives the kinds of spiritual essentials that we cannot let be thrown out or lost to clutter, busyness, or change.

Oh, let us never forget to remember that God's ways are higher than our ways—they are sometimes incomprehensible, but they are always good. Let us remember that we can never outmatch God, but we can surrender to God and live. And let us remember that Jesus still invites us to rest—not just on Sundays, but every day, in every season, that we would continually cast upon Him our burdens and receive rest unto our souls.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning and welcome to this service of worship at First (Scots)! If you are here in person, we invite you to utilize the ministry of friendship pad, which is located at the side of each aisle, and to mark your attendance with us. I'm pretty sure even our livestream attendees can see the red rose in the sanctuary here to my right; it is there to celebrate the birth of Annabelle and Maisie, twin daughters of Alex and Caroline McEaddy Hart. We give thanks to God for this tremendous blessing, and we wish the whole family much joy and hopefully a little extra sleep in the weeks and months to come.

On this day, we are also mindful of those who are grieving, and so I want to share with you that a memorial service for Larry Mayland will be held here on Sunday, August 24, at 2:00 PM. Please continue to keep Tina Mayland and Larry's family in your thoughts and prayers.

This morning, during our Time with Children, we'll be having our Blessing of the Backpacks, and just so you know, this is for all the children, whether or not they brought a backpack. So, to our students, even if you didn't bring one, please come forward—you will still receive a blessing from Pastor Pete.

Speaking of Dr. Sutton, before worship this morning, he hosted our second Donuts and Coffee over at the Carriage House, and it was wonderful to see several of you there. Thank you, Peter, and thanks to everyone who brought donuts and snacks.

Please know that we are currently looking for someone to serve as an online greeter, someone who can regularly or occasionally welcome folks as they log on to watch our livestream. If that sounds like something you'd be interested in, you are invited to contact the church office.

I am pleased to say that registration is now open for our Wednesday afternoon Kirk Club ministry. You can sign up by scanning the QR code in today's bulletin. Kirk Club begins Wednesday, September 10, which is also the first night back for our Wednesday Family Night Suppers.

Last but by no means least, we require a few more Meals on Wheels volunteers to help serve our community. To share with us more about this important ministry, I'd like to invite Sugar Slaybaugh to come forward at this time to offer today's Minute for Mission.