

When our family gets together, we are like many families. We laugh. We tell stories. We remember. Sometimes we even cry.

One of our favorite family stories to tell took place many years ago. My children were young. Amanda was in Middle School. Natalie and Whitney were in early elementary school. Isaac was not yet a part of our family.

As we sat around the table, Natalie was telling us that she was having trouble seeing the front board at school. It was getting blurry. Well, this isn't really new. It happened for Natalie just about every year. So I looked at her mom and said, "I guess its time for an eye appointment."

Whitney looked at Natalie and said, "Natalie, that happens to me to sometimes. And when it happens, I just close my eyes and shake my head like this (shaking her head). Then when I open my eyes, I can see again."

We all looked at Whitney and started laughing. As recently as this summer, Whitney said something while she was here and I said, "Oh, yeah, then I just close my eyes and shake my head, and when I open them, I can see again."

Whitney looked at me and said with a smile on her face, "You will never let me forget that, will you?"

I said, "Nope."

Remembering, it is one of the most important ways to help us through times of longing and grief. Today we are celebrating All Saints Day in the church. It is a time for us to remember the people who have been involved in our church and a part of our lives in Christ. Remembering helps us in two ways. On the one hand, it helps us remember their faithfulness, so that their faithfulness can inspire us

to live more faithful lives. On the other hand, remembering them and their faithfulness is also a healthy way to help us deal with the feelings of longing and loneliness we have as we miss them.

In our scripture for today, we are given a beautiful vision of a new heaven and a new earth. We are shown a new Jerusalem, descending from heaven. This vision serves to remind us that this world as we know it today isn't yet complete. It isn't the way it will end up. It is imperfect. **But the vision is that God is not done yet. And someday God will come to set everything right.**

This vision has its roots in a time of turmoil and turbulence in the early church. They know the world isn't right. They can open their eyes and see it all around them, in the pain and persecution they are enduring.

Like those in the early church, we can look around us and see that this world isn't the way God intends it to be. Siblings shouldn't kill one another. The presence of war in our world is a reminder that we are not always good at working out our problems. The problem of homelessness is a reminder that our world isn't right. The problem of lack of insurance for people shows we still have a ways to go. We could go on and on with our list, but you get the picture. **Our world isn't the way God intends it to be. And God is not done yet, someday, God will come to set everything right.**

This is an important lesson for me to remember these days. Because I find that I have a deep longing within me. I am missing my daughter, Whitney, greatly. Most of you know the story. Whitney died this summer in a tragic way. Our son, Isaac - Whitney's brother - is incarcerated for her death.

I find that I long for little things, like one more time to hear her laugh. I long for one more breakfast together. I long for one more Thanksgiving with her. I long for one more chance to hear her

voice. I long for one more opportunity for her to do something silly. I long for her.

And remembering the different stories and telling them with others who will listen, allows me to know that her life has had meaning and it has touched lives far beyond what I have expected. Remembering and telling the story of what made Whitney special allows her to continue to live.

The ancient Jewish people believed that as long as we remembered a person, and named their name and told their story, they were not dead. They continued to live.

So if you ever wonder, why on earth do they have those long lists in the bible of who was the father/mother of whom, who was the father/mother of whom, etc., it is so that they can be remembered. So they can live. So they can still have a story.

I recently read an article of a person whose brother had died, and she said, "As long as I have love for this person, they will continue to live and be remembered."

Remembering and telling the story of people, is important for us as we face grief. It actually helps bring healing to our life.

But remembering is also important to us in the church. Because we can look at these people who have died and we can see their faithfulness in living. And their faithfulness can inspire us to be faithful and stay faithful.

We can remember people like Dorothy Phillips and how she faithfully was here to work for missions and for ministry. It is impossible for me to come eat at a funeral and not think of Dorothy, because the baked bean recipe we use is the one Dorothy gave us.

We can think of Tom Farmer's commitment to his family and to athletics in this community. We can remember Janet Nichols faithfulness and her love of her family.

We can remember Whitney's love of God and of life and allow that to inspire us.

For each one of the people we will name today, they have a story of how God touched them and their life. And that story can guide us to greater faithfulness if we allow it to.

So on this day, who do you remember? How do they teach you about God? On this day, who is alive to you, even if they have passed on from this life, to life eternal? On this day, whom do you remember and long for?

May God help us remember. No, our world isn't the way it is supposed to be yet. But God isn't done with us. God comes to touch us and heal us. May we, in our remembering those who mean so much to us not only grow into deeper faithfulness, but may we come to experience the healing that we desire.

Amen