If I forget Jerusalem may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Today I want to talk about living off of memories. I have come to realize that even though we chronicle years and months and dates and anniversaries and birthdays and we commit and commemorate those things and we appreciate the times we have spent with people. What I have realized its not the days, the weeks, the months, or the years that stay with you. I have been dating Alice for 10 years and in all honesty, I don’t remember ten years. I don’t remember 10 Christmases, 10 anniversaries, 10 birthdays, 10 Easters. I remember some of them not all of them. I remember moments and memories. And I have come to understand at my young age that all that matters in life are moments and memories. One of the worse things you can loose is your mind and your memories because all life is about the moments and the memories.

Memories are important because they are what you sit on the couch and laugh about with your teeth in a cup, they are what you enjoy when you are around the fire pit wrapped in a blanket because it is too cold, and you are giggling about things along the way. For example. Well, I didn’t get permission for this, but I am going to have to get forgiveness. We had not been married for long when we had mice living in our home. I mean we lived in an older home in the suburbs right up against some trees and open land between us and a development. And so, we had mice. And Alice does not like mice. You may be thinking to yourself knowing pastor like I do. there is no way that he likes mice, and you are correct I don’t like mice but growing up in nyc I dealt with rats in the subway, so mice are not that bad, and so hear Alice scream when the mouse runs by and having to buy non-lethal mice traps to catch the mouse and drive it miles away to let it out in the wilderness was a treat for me as a husband to provide for my wife.

Or when we were celebrating our first anniversary we stayed at a bed and breakfast in Ohio and we brought our bikes and are riding around coming out of the bnb and we get right up to the town homecoming court parade before the football game and so we follow on our bikes then go get dinner and of course we head to the game. Those are memories. When we sit on the couch resting in each other’s arms it’s those stories that we share. The greatest moments are not always those that we dress up and smell good for, sometimes its those wild moments where we are truly ourselves that make the best memories.

You see memories are important and I believe God understands that. And there are some things that God does so that you can define your relationship with him on the basis of a memory. He told Moses to tell the Israelites sacrifice the lamb and put the blood on the doorpost and the lentil and the death angel will Passover you and that one moment became a point of reference for the next thousand years. From then on out God says am I not the God who brought you up out of Egypt and delivered you from the hand of Pharaoh. And now every time they came up against an obstacle, they would be able to call on that one moment as a point of reference to build their faith up and remember if God can do that, He can do this too.

Palm 137 is one of the bloodiest Psalms in the Psalter. He prays for God to kill the Edomites and their children. He is keeping as we would say 100. Because the psalmist is going through a lot and to understand the text we must understand that he left Jerusalem on the run. His home besieged by the Babylonians and Edomites. The nine tribes have been lost and the remnant escaped but only a few. They have been beaten until they were bruised and battered. You can just imagine what happened to the women and the men we know who resisted were castrated. And with blood around their legs and chains around their ankles they are dragged away from Jerusalem.

Away from the place where they rose up in the morning to the smell of baking bread and could here the copper smiths early in the morning, the women singing down by the water singing their hymns. Able to see the beautiful temple where God dwelled. But now it lay in ruins. The smell of fresh baked bread is replaced with the stench of burning flesh. Remember Jerusalem defines everything about them. Their faith, their culture, everything about them.

Who would have thought it could be lost and yet it is lost to them. It’s a painful crushing moment because as they are taken away, they would never know if they would see it again. Because some things when you lose them you can’t be sure when you will get them back. And so maybe they look back one last time to etch it in their minds so that they will never forget. They sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept, and not because of physical pain of the shackles, dehumanizing, and the castration but because of what they lost. And now all that they are left with is a memory of what they once had.

I come here every Sunday and I preach to a crowd that is fewer than I am used to and came in for Christmas in a sanctuary that was half filled compared to last year when we had a surprise with a choir performance that had not been done here in years. And you know what is funny, I can stand here and preach to one person and the emptiness doesn’t hurt. It was the memory of the full that hurt. When I remembered what was. Sometimes you forget what you lost until something reminds you of what you had. And that memory is what they needed.

There’s a pop music song called memories and in the song the singer sings, memories, bring back memories, bring back you. And what he is proclaiming is the power of memories. Memories have the power to take us back to moments in time. Memories can bring back our loved ones as if we are living through a moment in time again. And this is the key, I don’t want you to miss it. When our memories can bring us back to moments they must be used as a reminder of what God has done in the past, and what God can do in the present. And in so doing, memories are used to keep us on track. We cannot live in memories but they can power us forward.

We must remember that God knows memories and moments are important. Don’t believe me go back and read Genesis. When God is speaking to Abraham and making the covenant with Abraham, this moment in time is predicted. God tells Abraham about the suffering his descendants are going to face. Now fast forward to Joseph and Joseph tells his brothers what they meant for evil God turned into good. Could it be that the good being spoken about was not just the helping Israel through the famine, but the memory of the escaping through the Red Sea. Could it be God knew this all would happen and planned a memory for Israel to hold onto when the trials and tribulations of conquering Canaan would arrive. They have gone over 1000 years living off a memory of deliverance from Egypt, and now they know we need a memory, so let us not forget Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem will be the memory we will use to keep fighting and get back to rebuild what once was.

You don’t believe me lets fast forward through the Exile to the rebuilding of the temple and the old men who knew the former Jerusalem are weeping and possibly weeping because that memory held them through and they are seeing the greatness of God unfold in the temple, in a rebuilt Jerusalem. And the young men who don’t have that memory of Jerusalem and nothing to compare the new temple too are excited and shouting for joy.

That’s the power of memories and so here is what I want you to do. When you are struggling through this pandemic go back to a memory of God to help you. The second thing I want you to do is after we make it through this to the other side, create this deliverance as a memory. So that in the future you can refer to God by this memory. The Israelites had the God who brought them out of Egypt, we will have the God who brought us out of the pandemic.