

## **History, Tradition & Time**

### **Old Testament Reading - Isaiah 29:13-21**

### **New Testament Reading - Mark 7:1-23**

#### **Prelude**

Today is the last day of the 12 Days of Christmas.

Most of us have no idea what the 12th Days of Christmas are outside the song.

The twelve days form what is known as Christmastide, 12 days starting on Christmas Day and ending today, on the 5th of January,

also known as the Twelfth Night.

These days are celebrated specifically by the Western Church.

The Eastern Church celebrates Christmas using a different calendar and so their Christmas actually falls on the 7th of January.

(Those who still use the Julian Calendar rather than the Gregorian)

In fact, Christmas is first recorded in the western church in 354 A.D.

If that's not confusing enough, Jesus' real birth was probably not in December nor at 0 A.D. The best guesses by scholars are 6-4 B.C. in the Spring.

Why do I say all of this?

It is because it is tradition and history.

#### **History & Memory**

Let's begin with History & Memory.

As the agnostic philosopher George Santayana so famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it."

*(Life of Reason, Volume 1: Reason in Common Sense. 1904-1905)*

I'm not sure if this is entirely true, but we do indeed derive our identity through our memories.

This is the amnesiac's problem.

One who does not remember their past does not recognize their present and they have no direction for their future.

I am sometimes asked in pastoral counseling, "What is so important about my past?"

That is one of the diseases of our current age.

In our postmodern society, we have discredited our past to the point of discarding it.

We measure life, ourselves, the good and evil, by our own stunted perspectives.

Without history, we are spiritually blind, deaf and dumb.

Here is a simple illustration:

My wife sends me to the market to buy raspberry jam.

Along the way I forget what I was supposed to buy.  
Now there is a long chain of problems.  
First, I don't know why I am at market.  
Second, my wife is going to be frustrated with me.  
Third, she will not be able to do what she wanted to do with that jam (make jam jam cookies).  
Fourth, I will be hungry and we will have nothing to share in hospitality with the friends who are visiting us.

Here is a more significant illustration:

The church was established as a collective of individuals who share a common purpose of following Jesus and seek to reflect of the Kingdom of God to a lost world.  
Somewhere along the way, we forget why the church exists among the potlucks, bingo nights, youth ministries, social work, moral arguments and property maintenance.  
Now there is a very long chain of problems.  
We don't know why we are a part of a church.  
We begin to live like the rest of the world without any distinctive allegiance.  
We not longer reflect the Kingdom or the values of Jesus.  
We are cut off from Jesus and the Spirit.

So what do we do?

Well, it is the same as remembering our jam.

What helps you remember or appreciate your personal history?

What helps you remember or appreciate your family history?

What helps you remember or appreciate your spiritual history?

In the case of the jam, we swallow our pride and call home to ask what I was sent to do at the market.

In the case of the church and our individual lives, we call home and ask what we were created to do in the world.

The problem is that we remember the jam most of the time while we forget our existential purpose a Christians daily.

The answer the historic church has given to this is tradition.

### **But what about tradition?**

The Christian thinker and theologian Jaroslav Pelikan has said:

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.

And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.”

*(The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities)*

There is a marked difference between tradition and traditionalism.

Tradition is about remembering and hopefully remembering well.

Traditionalism occurs when the apparatus and construct of that remembering becomes unwieldy and overshadow the memory itself.  
Often time, traditionalism begins as tradition but evolves into something sinister.  
What was meant to help turns into something that hurts or even obscures.

A Trellis can become a cage.  
But a cage can be reformed into a trellis.

Isaiah 29:13-21  
Mark 7:1-23

Both passages illustrate God's perspective on how human rules of worship, how tradition becomes mere habit.  
And yet there are traditions and practices that endure.  
Communion, Baptism, Worship, Community, Mission, Discipleship, Scripture, Friendship, Art, Prayer, Calendar Anniversaries.  
They are meant to help us remember who we are in this universe, in this life.

What would help you remember and appreciate your personal history?  
What would help you remember and appreciate your family history?  
What would help you remember and appreciate your spiritual history?

### **The Tide of Time**

History is the telling of our stories.  
Tradition is about remembering the meaning of the stories.  
Ultimately, it is time that we are dealing with.

#I remember watching my children sleep.  
In that moment I realized that they would also watch me sleep one day never to wake.  
What would they remember of me?  
What would I have left behind not so much in the world but in their hearts?  
In the calendar New Year, which really is an arbitrary but established way we mark time, this is a time to reflect.  
On History, Tradition and Time.

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." - Psalm 90:12

[Ref. Is. 1; Mark 2:27; Col. 2:8]