

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**  
**Watertown, WI (920) 261-2570**

**“Remember Not the Sins of My Youth”**

Rev. David K. Groth

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*“Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord” (Ps. 25:7).*

In the fourth century St. Augustine wrote a wonderful book entitled “Confessions”. It was required reading for a class at the seminary. I wasn’t looking forward to it; it was from the fourth century. As it turned out, however, I loved it. Augustine writes with startling transparency and frankness, especially about his youth: “I was a great sinner for so small a boy” he says (p. 33). “I took pleasure in vices not only for the enjoyment of what I did, but also for the applause I won. Nothing deserves to be despised more than vice; yet I gave in more and more . . . simply in order not to be despised. If I had not sinned enough to rival other sinners, I used to pretend that I had done things I had not done at all, because I was afraid that innocence would be taken for cowardice and chastity for weakness.” (p. 46).

Augustine tells the story of the time he stole a pear from a neighbor’s tree. The neighbor caught him and scolded him harshly. Of course, that didn’t sit well, so . . . in the cover of darkness, Augustine went back with some friends and this time stripped the tree of pears.

These are the sorts of shenanigans he engaged in. A little later, as a young man, he writes, “I lived with a woman, not my lawful wedded wife but a mistress whom I had chosen for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her. . . Living with her, I found out by my own experience, the difference between the restraint of the marriage alliance, contracted for the purpose of *having* children, and a bargain struck for lust, in which the birth of children is *begrudded*, though, if they come, we cannot help but love them” (p. 72).

Augustine summarized the transgressions of his youth by saying, “The evil in me was foul, but I loved it” (p. 47). Once he even prayed, “Lord fix me, but not yet.”

What do you think of when you think about the sins of *your* youth? What transgressions from long ago haunt you still? What memories make you cringe?

As a child, were you a little racist; did you do or say hurtful things to a person of color? Did you mercilessly mock a classmate for having some sort of impediment or social or intellectual deficiency? Did you get carried away on a date and go much further than you should have, or, far worse, against her wishes? Did you exploit the vulnerabilities of your siblings, saying things you knew would cut deeply? Were you cruel to wildlife just for the sake of being cruel?

“Remember not, O Lord, the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways.” What do you think about when you hear that verse?

It’s tempting to make light of the sins of our youth and shrug them off as youthful impulse or inexperience or foolishness. We avoid the word sin, but some of the things we did, some of the things we said, they cannot and should not be called any other word. Some of our stories, we can tell now with a little humor. There are other stories each of us owns, stories we will never tell, because we’re so ashamed.

And when does the age of youth end? When you get out of high school or college and start working? Or is it more the case, the follies of youth become the vices of adulthood? Is it the case that the excesses of youth become the disgrace of old age? Is it the case, that as youth we build habits, some of which plague us for the duration? You know, he holds us accountable for the sins of our youth. He gives no free passes, just because of young age, or for that matter, old age.

Moreover, the thing about the sins of our youth, is that there’s really not a whole lot we can do about them. It’s not as if we can rewind the tape and edit some things out. So there’s a miserable sense of helplessness that accompanies our guilt-ridden memories. The words we so regret cannot be retracted. The cruel things we did cannot be undone. We deplore the evil and the injury we did, but cannot fix it. We cannot tinker with time; our hands are bound. With no one else to turn to, we can only turn to Him: “Remember not

the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me.”

When God remembers something, it’s not simply a matter of intellectual recall, such as the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides, (or something like that). When God remembers something, there’s always an action that follows. Because God remembered His covenant, Jesus was born to be our Savior. In the Magnificat, Mary praises the Lord, who has remembered His mercy promised to Abraham and his offspring forever (Lk. 1:54-55). Because God remembers His covenant, He came the first time, and because God remembers His covenant, He will come again. When God remembers something, there’s always action that follows.

So it wasn’t just love that drove Jesus to the cross. It was also His memory, memory of our sin that needed washing and forgetting, and memory of His promises of old. Therefore, the sins our youth were already on the shoulders of Jesus nearly two thousand years ago, because the Lord *can* tinker with time. He can rewind the tape, or fast forward, or do whatever he needs to do with time in order to claim our sins as His own. And that’s precisely what He did. We try to shrug off the sins of our youth, but Jesus took ownership and responsibility for them. God didn’t excuse those sins or laugh them off. He died for them.

Now, one of our challenges is to receive that forgiveness Jesus won for us, to internalize it and appropriate it. Maybe it was long ago, many decades even. But there’s no statute of limitations on His forgiveness. So, hand the sins of your youth over to the Lord. Let Him have them, all of them, especially those that would make you cringe. When you think of those, no longer think about what you did, but rather, what God in His mercy has forgiven. Don’t linger on how far you went astray, but rather on how He found you and restored you.

The devil will want to cast doubt in your mind that you are fully forgiven. He will want you to cringe again and again, sort of like when you can’t keep your tongue off a loose and painful tooth. But his argument is no longer with you. It is with Jesus, who has already paid the price of those sins and has forgiven you. His love covers over and hides a multitude of sins. He remembers you, not according to the sins of your youth, but according to His steadfast love.

There are sins from your youth and mine that would make us blush to speak of them. But He does not blush to be called our God. In Hebrews 8 He says, “I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake and remembers your sins no more” (v. 12). As an act of His will, he determines *not* to remember your sin. According to His steadfast love, He remembers you. Thanks be to God. Amen.