

- 1) *Forget it!* – that brief, blunt command could hardly be clearer, could it
But what the command REQUIRES depends altogether on the meaning of the “IT.”
 - *Forget it!—No worries. I forgive you—I know you meant no harm by it.*
 - *Forget it!—Enough already—give it a rest. You’re grinding an axe, stuck in a rut!*
 - *Forget it!—You’re welcome, don’t mention it—you’d do the same for me.*
 - *Forget it!—It’s an interesting idea, but it won’t work.*
 - *Forget it!—Let’s not go there, it’s too dangerous—let sleeping dogs lie.*
 - *Forget it!—We totally disagree—no point talking about it, let’s move on.*FORGET IT—to know what “IT” means,
You’ve got to know who’s involved, what’s in play, what’s at stake.
- 2) In this morning’s lessons, we heard FORGET IT twice—once from Isaiah, once from Paul.
Which of all those FORGET IT’s are they? None of the above.
Each seems to send a mixed message.
Both go on at length, describing in detail the IT they want forgotten.
Each author leaves the strong impression that HE wants to KEEP IN mind
what he SAYS he wants US to PUT OUT of our minds. Strange.
- 3) Paul lists every single item on his own CV before he declares it RUBBISH.
One wonders if he doeth protest too much:
I’ve forgotten all my very impressive credentials—let me list them for you, one by one.
Why doesn’t Paul just say: *In following Jesus, I’ve left my past behind?*
GOOD QUESTION! Park it for the moment.
- 4) Isaiah’s FORGET IT is harder to wrap our minds around.
We need to know where he’s coming from.
What Isaiah tells his people to forget is their Exodus from Egypt—
To forget the very God-engendered freedom narrative that defines their core identity—
the identity that, every Passover, they are solemnly enjoined NEVER to forget.
That identity is especially critical for them now—they’ve been long exiled in Babylon.
They’ve just been granted leave to return—but to a devastated homeland.
Does Isaiah really want them to turn lose of a memory
that is all about who they have been—and about all that they have left?
If so, it seems cruel to dangle before them the Exodus memory in vivid detail,
then suddenly say FORGET IT!
- 5) But, come to think about it, “remembering” and “forgetting” aren’t always an either/or.
There are times when we need to remember in order to forget.
Some memories buried deep may need to be exhumed in order to be exorcised.
Some memories need to be rigorously, even ruthlessly reconsidered
so that self-justifying, but self-deceiving nostalgia can be confronted and corrected.

The past was not so perfect as we idealize and idolize.
Sometimes we DO need to remember, so that we CAN forget;
and sometimes we need to forget so that we can re-member our past in a new way.
Rather than backing into the future, still facing our past,
we need to face into the future with the past at our back—though still HAVING our back;
we can be UPHELD BY the past without being held CAPTIVE to it.
How God encounters, confronts, delivers, and leads us is always and never the same.
We need a sense of both that continuity and that discontinuity.
But that's putting it abstractly—how does it play out actually—for Paul and for Isaiah?

- 6) Paul had been passionate for God all his life, in every way he knew how to express it.
That got misdirected, he says, when he persecuted the first followers of Jesus.
God had to take him on a hairpin turn.
What God did NOT do, however, was tell him: *Hey Paul, just CHILL.*
Give up your passion for God's law—Spend no energy loving me.
Paul needed to remember his love for God so that he could forget how he was misunderstanding it.
Paul needed to let God reframe and redirect his love in a different way.
- 7) To the desperately despondent, hopeless-feeling fellow members of his faith community,
folks holding on for dear life to the memory of the Exodus, Isaiah says:
Once upon a time, the waters of the Nile threatened you with death.
God pushed them back—made a way for your journey toward freedom on dry ground.
But now you're not in Egypt—You're in desert—a very dry place, indeed.
The water that once blocked your road toward freedom
is now water you need to continue that freedom journey.
Water once death-threatening will now become life-giving.
I am doing a NEW thing—I will lead you by means of springs of water in the desert.
Isaiah urges his listeners to remember the past so that they can mindfully forget it.
Mindful forgetting is essential so that their history can be re-membered—
Not its broken pieces put back together “just like it was”
But those pieces reconstituted by God in a whole new way—
a way necessary for their journey NOW.
By reminding them of their history, Isaiah is putting them IN mind
of God's signature strategy of taking people on surprising turns.
- 8) Peggy and I came to Redeemer over 20 years ago (is that possible?).
It was only two weeks after the new sanctuary space had been dedicated by the bishop.
We were instantly impressed at how old space had been integrated with new.
It was much later when we learned that the space had literally been “turned around”.
What once was the front had become the back.
We also learned, that, in many more ways than one,
the church had not “turned on a dime”—
had not made the changes quickly, or easily, or entirely happily—
but that the people of Redeemer had allowed themselves to be dis-oriented
in the hope, and in the trust that they could, with God's help, be reoriented.

The last twenty years have been in more ways than one,
a journey of remembering, forgetting, and re-remembering.

We are about to embark upon yet another re-orientation.

It is a reorientation of physical space to foster a reorientation of worship space.
And these changes not simply for their own sake, or just for better sound,
or for closer congregational seating.

This is a physical space reshaping that, in hope and trust, we offer to God,
so that God has room to do a “new thing” in our midst.

We are doing more today than moving chairs around.

We are turning seating inward so that we can better sense
how God’s love comes TO us all by coming THROUGH us all.

And, from there, how God’s love can best go outward BEYOND us all.

9) So we are embarking on the next stage of an ongoing adventure in mindful forgetting
without knowing just how it will “all turn out.”

We are undertaking an interplay of remembering and forgetting,
so that we can perceive and embrace

the re-remembering work God always undertakes among us.

Re-remembering us as the Body of Christ—given, fresh and new, for the life of the world.