

14th Sunday after Pentecost
St. George Lutheran Church, Brighton, MI
Stewardship Series: "Remembering God at Work in the Past"
Luke 24:1-12
September 14, 2025

I was three years old when I got my first toy tractor. It came on Christmas morning. A John Deere tractor with a red wagon. It was the first of many farm tractors that I would receive during my childhood, which should not have been a surprise. My Dad was a mechanic at a White Farm Equipment dealer. He also farmed in the evenings and on weekends.

What might be a surprise is that I still have some of those toy tractors. Though it's less of a surprise if you know my family – we tend to save things. And while my tendency to do so has been lessened by the fact that I've moved a few times, I still have saved a lot of things. Including some of my toy tractor collection.

Which is good news for my son, Mason. Though I haven't shared my whole collection with him, I did give him that very first John Deere and red wagon a couple of years ago. And as expected he has enjoyed playing with it. He's been in a phase of liking anything with wheels. But what I didn't expect was how much I enjoyed watching him. And not just watching him play, but remembering what my own childhood was like.

It might have been surprising to hear the Easter story this morning, especially in the middle of September. But besides being the story that is at the

heart of our faith, there is a particular detail in Luke's account of the resurrection that I'd like us to reflect on this morning.

The story begins on the first day of the week at early dawn. A group of women, the same ones who saw Jesus draw his last breath, and the same ones who saw where he was buried, were on their way to anoint his body. But when they arrived, they found that the stone had been rolled away and that Jesus' body was not there.

Two men in dazzling clothes came and stood beside them. The women were terrified. The men then said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen." And then they said, "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over...and be crucified and on the third day rise again." Upon hearing this, the women remembered Jesus' words.

It would be easy for us to criticize the women for not remembering what Jesus said. But to do so would overlook the fact that many of us have heard Jesus' predictions of his suffering multiple times. Jesus' disciples, on the other hand, probably only heard this prediction three times, at least that is what we know from Scripture. However, based on the disciples' response to these predictions, it isn't clear that they fully grasped what Jesus was saying.

And even if they did understand at the time, the events of the days leading up to that morning might have affected their recollection of Jesus' words. Anyone who has been through a traumatic experience knows that in the midst of whatever is happening, we might not remember things. So I think the women can be forgiven for the slight delay in remembering what Jesus said.

But notice what the women did when they remembered. They went from the tomb and told the others what they had seen, or maybe more precisely what they did not see. To be sure, the disciples did not believe the women at first, but I don't think that was the fault of the women. And in spite of the initial hesitation, the good news that the women first shared with the other disciples did spread. The women saw. They remembered. And they went to tell others.

All of which are part of what we do as a congregation. This year has been a year of remembering for St. George Lutheran Church as we celebrate 180 years of ministry in our community. Since April 23, 1845, God has been at work through the people of St. George. To celebrate the occasion, we had a special worship service back on April 23. We have brought out some historical items to put on display. A special historical booklet was assembled (and if you haven't gotten one there are a few on the table by the front doors). Along the way, pictures have been brought out and memories have been shared. It is all part of remembering the history of our congregation.

But this history isn't just about dates and events. It isn't just about our historical building. And isn't just about the stories that have been told and retold.

As we remember the past we are reminded of who we are. Just like a toy tractor and wagon are a small part of who I am, every photo, every historical item, and every story are a small part of who we are as a congregation.

And part of who we are as a congregation is that we are baptized children of God, and as baptized children of God, we are called to be part of God's work in the word. And so as we remember the past, we can also see how God has been at work among us. Every story, every photo and every historical item can remind us that God has been at work through us.

Now if we're honest there are probably details of our history that do not reflect God's ways. Congregations lose sight of what God's mission is for them. There are times of conflict. No congregation is perfect. But the remarkable thing is that God has still chosen to work through us, God's people, imperfect though we may be, to do God's work in the world.

Since 1845 God has been at work through the buildings in which we've gathered to worship, learn, serve, and enjoy fellowship with one another. God has been at work through the more than 30 pastors who have served this congregation, starting with Pastor Frederick Schmidt, the first Lutheran missionary of Michigan. God has been at work through the various ministries that have taken place within

and outside of this building. God has been at work through our worship, our learning, and our food and fellowship. And God has been at work through all who have been part of this congregation whether they were a one-time visitor or a lifelong member.

So as we reflect on the history of St. George, may we also reflect on the ways in which God is at work. Which raises an important question: how do we know if God was at work? And the truth is, this isn't always easy to see.

But I think our gospel for today gives us a good place to start. Because the Easter story is the good news that is at the heart of our faith; the good news that God brings life out death, and light out of darkness; the good news that even in our struggles, even in the valley of the shadow of death God will never abandon us.

So when were the times in our history when God brought about new life? When were the times of struggle through which God accompanied us and maybe even brought about something new? What were the ministries that have brought light and life to our community and our world over the years?

And as we remember the past, as we remember God at work, what do we do next? Like the women who remembered what Jesus said, we too have a story to tell. We have a story to tell about God who does amazing things through God's people. The story of St. George is not just dates and events. It is a story of God at work through God's people here in Brighton. And the story of God's work is not

just for us within these walls, but also for our community, because God is still at work. God's story is still being told through us, for the sake of our community and our world, just as it has been for the past 180 years.

This is also a stewardship story. Stewardship is all about using what God has entrusted to us. Throughout our history, God has entrusted the people of this congregation with many things. And thanks be to God for what God has done through the time, talent, and treasures of the people of St. George Lutheran Church.

This morning as you came into worship, you should have received a small blank sheet of green paper. Not the pledge cards, but the blank sheets. I had forgotten until after cutting them that the pledge cards are also green. Please raise your hand if you don't have one. What I would invite you all to do is write down a word or short phrase about the history of St. George. Maybe a particular ministry or event, or person, or characteristic comes to mind. Maybe it's something for which you're particularly thankful, or just something that stands out to you. If you're new to the congregation or visiting today, maybe it's something you've heard or observed in your short time here or just this morning. There are no wrong answers. Please feel free to think about it now and as we sing our next hymn.

In a few minutes, when we collect the offering, I invite you to put that slip of paper in the offering plate. If you're not quite ready when the offering is collected, please feel free to hand it to me on your way out.

Between now and next Sunday, I will take these words and phrases, and after giving thanks to God for them, I will use them to create what is called a Wordle. Maybe you've seen one. The best way to describe it is that it is like a collage of words. I look forward to sharing it with you next Sunday.

Let us pray:

Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for this congregation, St. George Lutheran Church. We give you thanks for 180 years of ministry in this community. We thank you for people who have given of their time, their talents, and their treasures, all in response to your unconditional love for us. With gratitude we remember the past and the ways in which you have been at work through this congregation. We pray that you would continue to work through us, as we share your good news with the world that you love so very, very much.

Amen.