

Remember What?

Ի՞նչ Յիշել

(Armenian Genocide Memorial Day)

Psalm 42

107 years passed since the crimes that the Turkish government committed towards our nation. For more than a century, we Armenians have been crying out to all nations to recognize our Genocide.

“As of 2022, governments and parliaments of 33 countries—including the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Russia and Brazil—have formally recognized the Armenian genocide.”¹

Unfortunately, others countries (including Israel, Pakistan) ignore or deny it for various unjustifiable reasons. Worse, when neighboring countries of Armenia invaded Artsakh and Armenian borders the world was silent. As if they did not care.

We commemorate the Genocide every year. The question I ask myself is: “What do we remember? What do we commemorate?”

-First, we remember the pain of our forefathers and foremothers.

As many of you did, I grew up with the horrible stories of the Genocide. Each of you has his/her own family story. Some people including my grandfather wrote down some of his memories that we later published. When he was five years old, he was attacked with a sword and was left alone because he pretended to be dead. I hear from my wife about her grandparents who lost many family members. Her grandmother one of thousands of women who were obliged to put their newborns under a tree hoping someone would rescue them. She had to cover her face with mud so that no one would find her attractive and rape her. She tried to throw herself in the river and die, but somehow God rescued her. We read about the assassination of the intellectuals of the society, starting from the teachers, writers, priests and pastors. How strange that 2020 war reminded us that the neighboring countries until now they have evil desires to invade and control our nation.

When we look at the Bible, we read about **the suffering of another nation who lost their land**. They were exiled and could not worship God at the Temple in Jerusalem. In **Psalm 42**, the songwriter, the psalmist is in Jordan, on the heights of

Mount Hermon and not in Jerusalem. He is remembering the days when he could worship God in the Temple with his fellow worshipers.

The psalmist is in tears (vs. 3). His tears have become **his food day and night**.

Like a deer that is so thirsty searching for water, his soul is thirsty for the living God. (vs. 1)

The imagery is so vivid; it reminded me of the days when our ancestors had a similar experience in the deserts of Deir Zor. Yes, like thirsty deer, they too searched for water, searched for food, searched for security and shelter. Yes, similar to the psalmist's experience, their eyes were full of tears that became their food, and they were also mocked by the Turkish authorities saying, **"Where is your God?"** (vs. 3)

When we are in pain or suffering injustice even today some of us ask, "Where is God, where was God".

Where was God in our Genocide? Did God forget our cry? How can the God of justice allow such a horrible tragedy to occur?

Similar statements and questions are asked by the psalmist.

"My soul is downcast within me" (vs.6); **"I say to God my rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?' Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'"** (vs.9,10)

It is a terrible thing to suffer from **amnesia**. I have seen individuals forgetting who they are, forgetting their spouses or children. My grandmother, who had Alzheimer's, forgot where she lived; she used to tell me she was in Aintab and not Aleppo. We had to lock our door so she would not go out looking for her home elsewhere.

But it is sad also that we forget things when we are **extremely occupied**. People forget their child in the car for example. Every year unfortunately many kids pass away because of negligence of their kid in the car.

-My car reminds me every time when I turn off the car, in the dashboard a warning sign and sound appears to check my back seat.

Every time when the Israelites recited 10 Words, the commandments they said:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:1 ESV)

in my words, remember who your God is.

Memory in the OT is a very important reality. From the Pentateuch through the Prophets, 350 times we find this concept occurring. For the Israelites, recalling something or bringing it to memory was not just a static idea.

“Almost without exception, a call to remember is at the same time a call to action.

Israel is called to remember **Yahweh in order to remain faithful to Him.** She is to remember the commandments and keep them. She should remember Yahweh’s wonderful acts and give praise for them.”²

Going back to our psalm:

Psalm 42 has two sides.

On one hand, the psalmist **laments and asks tough questions.**

On the other hand, he **remembers God’s presence in his suffering.**

-Secondly, we remember the resurrection of the dry bones in the deserts of Deir Zor.

Although we lost 1.5 million Armenians, we remember that we had survived and we still live and praise our God who is our shelter and refuge. Each of us is a testimony of survival. Our existence together as an Armenian church is witness to the resurrection of the dry bones.

Our psalmist realizes the tragedy he is living, yet he **also remembers** how he was with **“the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.”**(vs. 4)

He also says: **(although)** **“my soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan...”**(vs. 6)

These words are also our words. I look back and find out that although we were driven out of Cilicia, but when we arrived to **Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Athens, Marseille, Ellis Island, Fresno...** and all over the world, we rebuilt new churches, new homes, new schools and started a new life. The enemy wanted to destroy us so we would not worship and pray to our God; on the contrary, the enemy could not stop us from remembering how important was and is to come together to worship and thank God for His miracle in our lives. The evidence is here today in our worship service.

When we look at the Bible we see many places where **Israelites forgot** who God was in their lives. It was not a matter of amnesia. No, it was a **willful choice** and a rejection **of memory**. God woke them up from their “amnesia”. Read the

prophets and you will find the **alerting** sound of God reminding them of their covenant.

We too as Armenians should be careful to not forget who God is and how God helped rebuild the Armenian communities in the Diaspora as well our nation of Armenia today. Therefore, like the psalmist, **let us respond collectively to our Creator in thanksgiving and praise. Let us find Hope in God.**

-Thirdly, we remember that God was and is in our suffering.

God who appeared to us through Jesus Christ does not stop the evildoers from crucifying His Son.

God did not interfere to stop Pilate.

God did not stop the Pharisees from their false accusations.

God did not stop the soldiers from mocking our Lord.

God suffered when Christ was suffering on the cross.

The same God suffered with us when our grandparents were walking the death-path.

The same God gave us courage to stand firm in our faith and not compromise.

The same God gave us courage to move on and establish new communities in different places, as William Saroyan says, **“Because when two of them meet anywhere in the world, you will see that they will create a new Armenia.”**

Paul says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35, 38,39 ESV)

-Fourth, In the end the psalmist in his tribulations he finds his refuge and comfort in God.

“Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,

For I will yet praise him,

My Savior and my God” (vs 11)

How wonderful are these words written by the psalmist! Although he does not find all the answers to his pain and agony, yet he finds hope in God and continues praising Him.

Let me quote from the commentary:

“The psalmist suggests another way to remember God’s faithfulness: to long for and avail ourselves whenever possible of opportunities to stand together with those who are worshiping God. Even if we feel distant or abandoned, the celebration will have the effect of renewing our certainty and hope.”³

We are in a worship service. We are worshiping with tears of pain and joy. It is a time of testimony and celebration for our life, our resurrected life, our new life.

It is time of confessing and forgiving.

It is a time for asking justice and recognition.

It is a time to be healed from the wounds so we can live today and tomorrow.

“(Worship) is the place where we remember the past, receive power to face the present, and conceive hope for tomorrow.”⁴

May God use this psalm to heal our wounds and learn to worship together remembering our Lord in our daily lives.

Amen

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_genocide_recognition#:~:text=As%20of%202022%2C%20governments%20and,formally%20recognized%20the%20Armenian%20genocide.

2 GERALD H. WILSON, NIV Application Commentary, Book of Psalms, P. 675

3 ibid, p. 679

4 ibid, p. 680