

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

December 28, 2025

The Reverend David E. Fox

First Sunday after Christmas (Year A) 2025

Isaiah 63.7-9

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

As we gather on this first Sunday after Christmas, we find ourselves in a season of reflection. The year is drawing to a close, and many of us are naturally looking back—remembering the year's joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, moments of clarity and seasons of confusion.

Our text today from Isaiah 63:7-9, invites us into a particular kind of remembering. The prophet calls us to "*recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord.*" This isn't casual reminiscing or nostalgic daydreaming.

Dr. Terry Ann Smith reminds us that when the prophet invites us to "reminisce," this is not mere nostalgia—it is testimonial. When we look back at what God has done, we're not just remembering; we're bearing witness to God's mercy and love. We're recounting God's faithfulness not just for our own encouragement, but as a declaration of who God is and what God does.

In verse seven, the word that we have for mercy is the Hebrew word *hesed*. This word captures something that our English translations struggle to convey: steadfast loyalty, faithfulness, and love all wrapped together in God's unwavering commitment to God's people.

Every gracious deed we remember, every praiseworthy act we recount, flows from God's *hesed*. This is the foundation beneath all of God's actions toward us—not our worthiness, not our faithfulness, but God's steadfast love that never wavers.

Think about Israel's story as the prophet recounts it. They failed repeatedly. They broke the covenant, turned to other gods, and repeatedly disappointed God. And yet, when the people failed to follow God and keep the covenant, it was God who remained faithful.

The relationship between God and God's people was framed and continually sustained by God's *hesed*. Their forgetfulness, spiritual short-sightedness, and downright neglect could not detract from or derail God's love. This is what makes our remembering so powerful—we're not recounting our achievements, but God's faithfulness in spite of our failures.

When we follow the prophet's call to recount God's gracious deeds, what do we remember? Scripture itself is filled with moments of intentional remembrance. Moses commanded Israel to remember their deliverance from Egypt: "*Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out*

of the house of slavery" (Exodus 13:3). The Passover meal became an annual act of remembering God's salvation.

Joshua set up twelve stones at the Jordan River so that *"when your children ask in time to come, 'What do these stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off"* (Joshua 4:6-7). These weren't just monuments—they were testimonial markers, designed to prompt the telling of God's gracious deeds.

The Psalms are filled with this kind of remembering. Psalm 77 declares, *"I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old"* (v. 11). Psalm 105 begins, *"O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works"* (vv. 1-2).

Dr. Smith helps us see the scope of God's faithfulness: "God crossed the Red Sea with these people, put up with their complaining and grumbling through the wilderness, and endured their constant rebellion and apostasy, and yet never gave up on them." God's gracious deeds aren't limited to the spectacular moments—they show up in the daily grind, in the wilderness wanderings, in the moments when the people were at their worst.

One of the most remarkable aspects of God's gracious deeds is how personal they are. Look at the tender language God uses in verse 8: "Surely they are my people, children who will not act deceitfully." God doesn't just call them "my people"—God affectionately calls them "children," revealing a familial bond of deep affection.

Dr. Smith makes a crucial observation about God's involvement in our stories: while God sent angels to guide, protect, and deliver throughout Scripture, God never entrusted salvation to a messenger. It is God who shows up. It is God's presence that ultimately saves.

When you recount God's gracious deeds in your life, remember this: you're not just remembering what God did for you from a distance. You're remembering how God showed up personally, walked with you through the valley, carried you when you couldn't walk, and never left your side.

The writer of Isaiah reminds us that God is not distant. Our God is personally invested in us, walking with us, redeeming us, and securing our salvation by God's own presence and power. This is the God who feels what we feel, sees when we struggle and fall away, hears our cries, shares our sorrows, and has mercy on us.

But the prophet's call to remember isn't just about looking backward. Throughout Scripture, remembering God's past faithfulness becomes the foundation for future hope. When David faced Goliath, he remembered how God had delivered him from the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:37). When Jehoshaphat faced overwhelming armies, he prayed, "O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel?" (2 Chronicles 20:7).

The woman at the well in Samaria remembered Jacob's well and God's provision for the patriarchs (John 4:12). Mary's Magnificat recalls God's mercy to Abraham and his descendants (Luke 1:54-55). Even Jesus, in his final hours, reminded his disciples to "*do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19), establishing the Lord's Supper as an ongoing act of testimonial remembering.

The power of testimonial remembering builds faith for the future. The same *hesed* that sustained the patriarchs, delivered Israel from Egypt, and carried the exiles home will sustain us through whatever lies ahead.

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, our remembering becomes prophetic. We declare by our testimonies that the God who has been faithful will continue to be faithful.

Sisters and brothers, as we prepare to enter a new year, let us heed the prophet's call to recount the gracious deeds of the Lord and the praiseworthy acts of the Lord. Not as mere nostalgia, but as testimonial. Not just for our own encouragement, but as a declaration of who God is.

Take time this week to remember. Write down the ways God has shown up in your life this year. Share those stories with others. Let your remembering become a testimony to God's *hesed*—that steadfast love that never fails, never wavers, never gives up.

And as you remember, let your past experiences of God's faithfulness fuel your hope for the future. The same God who called you "my child" with deep affection, who walked with you through ordinary days and messy moments, who showed up personally in your times of need—this same God goes with you into whatever lies ahead.

The God of gracious deeds and praiseworthy acts is still at work. Still showing up. Still faithful. Let us recount these truths not just today, but every day, as a living testimony to the God whose *hesed* endures forever.