

Sermon for Thanksgiving Day Eve

Date: November 25, 2020

Location: Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Epistle Reading: Philippians 4:6-20

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Sermon Title: Our Family History



Liturgy:

Creative Worship

(A combined worship service with: Holy Cross – Austin,
Our Savior – Brownsdale, and
St. John's – Austin.)



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Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

¹ Be careful to obey every command I give you today. Then you will live, and your population will increase. You will enter and take possession of the land that the LORD promised to your ancestors with an oath. ² Remember that for 40 years the LORD your God led you on your journey in the desert. He did this in order to humble you and test you. He wanted to know whether or not you would wholeheartedly obey his commands.

³ So he made you suffer from hunger and then fed you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had seen before. He did this to teach you that a person cannot live on bread alone but on every word that the LORD speaks. ⁴ Your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't swell these past 40 years. ⁵ Learn this lesson by heart: The LORD your God was disciplining you as parents discipline their children.

⁶ Obey the commands of the LORD your God. Follow his directions, and fear him. ⁷ The LORD your God is bringing you into a good land. It is a land with rivers that don't dry up. There are springs and underground streams flowing through the valleys and hills. ⁸ The land has wheat and barley, grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates. The land has honey and olive trees for olive oil.

⁹ The land will have enough food for you, and you will have everything you need. The land has rocks with iron ore, and you will be able to mine copper ore in the hills. ¹⁰ When you have eaten all you want, thank the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

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Grace to you and peace in Jesus' Holy name. Amen.

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers.

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.¹

If New Year's is about making resolutions and thinking about the future, then Thanksgiving is about remembering and thinking about the past. Turkey, stuffing, and stories get handed down from generation to generation. While the platters and gravy boats empty, the stories get filled out, with details and information.

Some of the stories are as old as the pilgrims, others are more recent. You can relive the past years by simply looking down the dining room table. Where grandpa used to sit, maybe now there is an empty chair; or perhaps where there was just a few chairs, now the dining room table is full and children have been relinquished to the dreaded card table. The older gray hairs, younger round faces, they all tell a story that rolls on through the generations.

The person who has no knowledge of family history, the one who doesn't know where he comes from, maybe can't really give thanks as fully. That person doesn't know for what he has to be thankful or whom to thank.

In our Old Testament reading today Moses is reminding the children of Israel, and us, who we are, and where we come from. He is doing that to help us remember. It's a short message, but he repeats it many times: "Remember the LORD"; "Remember and do not forget." I wonder if the children of Israel ever got tired of hearing that time after time, over and over again. Did they tune Moses out after a while?

"There he goes again. Hey, Moses, we already heard that one. How about something new?" Yet Moses continues to tell the old stories again, ... your stories. You hear him speak through your eyes, as you peer at the words on the pages. Though he is long dead, still through the images drawn on these pages, these marks and lines, allow us to hear him with our eyes. We still hear his voice speaking in Holy Scripture:

1 Deuteronomy 8:1-2

“Remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness.²”

For us these words have an even greater meaning. This is what God has done for us. He sent you a prophet much greater than Moses, Jesus Christ His Son, to save you through His death and resurrection. He brought you out of slavery to sin. He rescued you from the future of eternal death and the devil. He drowned your enemies in the Holy Baptismal water, and called you to be His own. He led you, year after year, through the wilderness of this world, a land in which you are a pilgrim, a stranger, a refugee and a foreigner. Even the way you speak sounds different from the world in which you live.

Remember.

Now Thanksgiving isn't simply about remembering facts and dates. The mental exercise of recalling names and dates might be good enough to pass a test at school, but that won't be enough for Thanksgiving. I might know all about 1621, the Plymouth Colony,³ the Mayflower,⁴ and William Bradford,⁵ but no one would say that I remember the first Thanksgiving.

Even if I make a Pilgrim's hat out of construction paper, enjoyed a forkful of turkey, and pumpkin pie, no one would say I remember the first Thanksgiving. A proper remembrance of Thanksgiving involves the whole person. The family stories and heritage need to be there. There is more to remembering than knowing the date.

So when Moses says, “Remember,” he isn't reciting a set of historical facts for us. He wants your entire life to be one of remembering. He wants you to remember the Lord with your heads, your hearts, and your hands. Through Holy Baptism, you are part of God's family. You get to sit at the table, His Holy Table. You are a child of God. Our heavenly Father's family is your family. It is a family that spans the globe. It is a table filled with people of many and varied color, and speech. Moses teaches us, remember the Lord your God by living as His child.

To be a child means first that you receive what your parents give to you. You live in their house, you eat at their table, you call to them when you are in need, and you enjoy all they possess simply out of their good nature and love for you. The same is true because we are children of our heavenly Father, through Holy Baptism. In this place, here in this house, you remember who you are. This is your

2 Deuteronomy 8:2

3 The colony settled by the pilgrims.

4 The ship that the first pilgrims sailed to arrive in the New World.

5 The first governor of the pilgrim settlement.

Father's house. This sacred altar is His Holy Table. You call him "Father," and He hears hear your voice. This isn't a one-time event. This isn't an once a year event. This isn't just a small encounter with someone who is kind. This is your family. This is your life as a child of God.

His delight is to give to you, to provide for you, to answer you when you call. He does this not only here but in your own home as well. Your roof, your bed, and your table they are all gifts from Him. The turkey, the stuffing, and sweet potato pie, it all come from His hands.

The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. You shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.⁶

God gives, you receive. In receiving, you remember. You remember who you are, His child.

The problem is we are living in the wilderness. That means that there may be hunger, sickness, disease, wants and tears along the way. Certainly most tables will have less this year than they did in the past. Some belts might need to be pulled a little tighter. That is not a sign that the Lord has forgotten us, but it can test you. It should cause you to remember God and grow.

You shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread, alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God...

Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.⁷

Will you still live as His child when the going gets tough? Can you see that even the little you do have is a gift from God? Though some tables may be empty this year you still have a table. That is more than some. Even some right here in this town. Can you, will you fear, love, and trust in Him as your good and gracious God? Have you not heard:

“Man does not live by bread, alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.⁸”

You aren't starving, and you have clothes on your back. The Lord provide.

The best memories that a child can give to his father is to do what his father does, to walk in his ways. Moses wrote:

“You shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in His ways and by [*respecting*] Him.⁹”

To be a child of the heavenly Father means to imitate Him. To forgive as He forgives, and to love as He loves. You show that you remember the Lord by loving and serving your neighbor. For that reason, today, we are gathered here to remember the Lord by receiving His gifts and by offering our lives, and our goods, back to Him in thanksgiving.

We are always in danger of forgetting who we are. In spiritual matters, as in the rest of life, we are prone to be forgetful, and sometimes have a selective memory. Thanksgiving Day should be a day that brings us back to a place where we remember. Remember your family. Today Moses jogged our memory. He reminded us who we are, children of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus.

Today we cannot enjoy that foretaste of the Feast to come as we would like, coming together in the Sacred Meal of Holy Communion, coming together at the Lord's Table. COVID is crushing many things. It is emptying many tables. COVID, like Satan, will fall, will not last, will not win. Come what may it cannot take us from our family.

Remember this by receiving God's gifts. Listen to His Word. Come as often as you can to this Holy Table, to eat and drink the Body and Blood of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of you sins, and eternal life. Remember who

7 Deuteronomy 8:2-5

8 Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4

9 Deuteronomy 8:6

you are. Remember who you are by living as one who has been redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Remember it with your heads, your hands, your hearts, your ears, and your mouths. Make it known among the peoples. With these remembrances, and with thanksgiving, go pick up the platter of His blessings, and tell the stories. Pass the gravy, as you pass the wisdom of God to the next generation, and enjoy all that the Lord has given you.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.



Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people