

## Deuteronomy 8:10-18

<sup>10</sup>Then you will eat, and you will be filled, and you will praise the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. <sup>11</sup>Be very careful so that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and ordinances and his statutes that I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup>When you eat and are satisfied, and you build nice houses and move into them, <sup>13</sup>and your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold increase, and everything that you have prospers, <sup>14</sup>watch out so that your heart does not become arrogant and forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. <sup>15</sup>Do not forget the LORD, who led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, where there were venomous snakes and scorpions, where the thirsty ground had no water, but the LORD made water come out of a flint rock for you. <sup>16</sup>Do not forget the LORD, who in the wilderness fed you manna, which your fathers had not known before, to humble you and to test you so that it would be good for you later on.

<sup>17</sup>You might say in your heart, “My ability and the power of my hand have earned this wealth for me.” <sup>18</sup>But then you are to remember that the LORD your God is the one who gives you the ability to produce wealth, to confirm his covenant that he promised to your fathers with an oath, as he does to this day.

## Remember

### I.

Do either of these images resemble you sometimes? We talk about people getting more forgetful as they grow older, but it’s common no matter what the age. Children often forget to do what their parents sent them to do. Adults get distracted by all the things going on around them and don’t remember what it was we got up from our chairs to get, or what it was we were supposed to get done. You might feel it would help to wallpaper the room, or even your own body, with post-it notes, but then you have to remember to look at the notes, or even notice them in the flurry of little squares with scribbling on them dotting the landscape.

Thanksgiving isn’t about remembering to get the salad dressing out of the fridge, or even to thank someone for something special they have done for you. In our text God is moving the Israelites—and us—to remember the great things he has done for us, and is continuing to do for us. There are a myriad of reasons to thank him.

Moses tells the people: “Watch out so that your heart does not become arrogant and forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. <sup>15</sup>Do not forget the LORD, who led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, where there were venomous snakes and scorpions, where the thirsty ground had no water, but the LORD made water come out of a flint rock for you. <sup>16</sup>Do not forget the LORD, who in the wilderness fed you manna, which your fathers had not known before” (Deuteronomy 8:14-16, EHV).

Moses spoke these words to Israel just before they entered the Promised Land of Canaan. For 40 years God had led the people and cared for them. He protected them from Pharaoh, and from all the problems they encountered in the wilderness: they had food to eat and water to drink, in spite of the fact that they were living in a barren area that could not hope to support so many people. It wasn’t luxurious living, but he brought them safely through to the brink of the Promised Land.

At times the people complained. Even then, God did not abandon them, or forget them. When they disobeyed, God disciplined them by sending venomous snakes, but even then he gave them the bronze serpent, and a promise that those who looked at it in faith would be healed.

Moses' reminder of all these things was to move Israel to praise and thank God for what he had done. It wasn't just the big things that affected the whole group of them standing there on the plain, but little things as well. Each family or individual would have things that had affected them personally on their journey to the Promised Land.

As a congregation of believers we can surely take Moses' words to heart. Holy Trinity has experienced times when it was tempting to just throw up our hands and quit. Financial challenges come to every group of believers, especially when you run a school, and daughter congregations. But there are times when we can clearly see the hand of God working and blessing our labors in his Kingdom. At every stage of our existence as a congregation we are to give him thanks, both the good and the bad. While Thanksgiving is a time when we can acknowledge the Lord's goodness to us as a congregation of believers, the holiday is more for families and individuals to remember what God has done for us in our own personal lives.

When you pause and think back, perhaps you remember many challenges. There have been times when you have been sick or discouraged, and it seemed no one cared. Things may have gotten so bad that you thought *God* forgot about you or didn't care.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, EHV). But sometimes it doesn't *feel* that way. What good can God possibly bring out of things when I have to declare bankruptcy? How can God bring good out of my failed marriage, or the loss of my job? How is God working for the good when my spouse dies?

I pray that after the fact you are able to look back, even at the darkest moments of your life, and see God's guiding and protecting hand. God wants you as his own. He wants you to realize that *he* is your most important possession. The writer to the Hebrews says: "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have. For God has said: 'I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5, EHV).

As God works in our lives he humbles us, and gets us to refocus our attention on him. As we look back at the cross of Calvary and the empty tomb, we realize God loved us so much that he forgave all our past mistakes. Remembering our baptism, we realize that he has made us his own dear children—members of his family. How can our hearts *not* simply explode with thanks and praise for the greatest gifts he could ever possibly give to us?

## II.

As Moses spoke to Israel they were standing at the threshold of the Promised Land. Moses said to the people: "You might say in your heart, 'My ability and the power of my hand have earned this wealth for me.'" <sup>18</sup>But then you are to remember that the LORD your God is the one who gives you the ability to produce wealth, to confirm his covenant that he promised to your fathers with an oath, as he does to this day" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18, EHV). It never takes long for human beings to point to themselves as the sole reason for success. Even though Israel had clear evidence of God's guiding hand throughout the last 40 years of their existence, it wouldn't take long for them to focus on themselves instead of God as the reason for their success.

Each of us can find ourselves subject to the same temptations. Failure always seems to be someone else's fault, or due to circumstances beyond our control. But we're quick to take credit for a successful career and a healthy bank account and retirement savings. It is important for us to realize what Moses told the people of Israel: *God* is the One who gives us our abilities. If we have used them well, we still are to remember that he is the Giver.

There are all kinds of things for which to give thanks on this day. Your family and friends, your home, your relatives. The things that escape your notice: water and sunshine and rain. Oxygen—something that perhaps you take for granted until you have difficulty breathing. Your material possessions. These are all a gift from God.

Then there is your spiritual life. God has given you faith in the Lord Jesus, who died for your sins. He loves you in spite of your faults and your weaknesses. He continues to bless you with his Word, which you study day by day on your own, and hear preached in church each week.

### III.

Most of all, however, remember to give thanks for where you are going. Just before our text, Moses had told the Children of Israel about the land they were to inhabit. He said: "The LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills;<sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;<sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills."<sup>10</sup> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (Deuteronomy 8:7-10, NIV84). Israel's future was to inhabit a rich land that would provide them with everything they needed.

Sometimes we speak of heaven as a land flowing with milk and honey, the way the Promised Land was sometimes described. God promises the same thing for our future. The "milk and honey land" of heaven is sure and certain for us because of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. God assures us that, just as he has kept us in the past, for Jesus' sake our sins are forgiven and heaven is our future home.

God will bring to pass his own good plan for your future life on earth, and your life eternal with him. This is what makes it possible for the difficulties in life to turn into praise. God grant that this day and always, our hearts are filled with Thanksgiving. Amen.