

Today, we stand right in the middle of two church years. We finished our last church year this past Sunday. We enter the new church year this coming Sunday. And right in between—we stuff this little Thanksgiving Service. Thanksgiving is a civic holiday rather than a church holy day. But thanksgiving—as an expression of gratitude to God—with a small “t”—is a way of life to which God calls His people.

We are a little like the Israelites who hear from Moses in Deuteronomy 8. Deuteronomy is a series of sermons that Moses delivers at the Jordan. We hear some of the history of this moment in the first four chapters. But then Moses sets God’s revelation from Sinai before them again. He begins with a recitation of the *10 Commandments*. Deuteronomy means *a repetition of the Law*. But he continues with what God has done for His people from the beginning.

The Israelites have been delivered from slavery in Egypt. They have received God’s instructions at Sinai. They have wandered in the desert for forty years. He cared for them throughout. And now, they wait on the eastern side of the Jordan. The Exodus generation has come and gone. And the next generation hears Moses’ last words. They are on the edge of something entirely new.

And so, in Deuteronomy, Moses prepares them for what is ahead. But this preparation includes looking back. They should know their history. He invites the Israelites to remember. He retells the story, reminds them of who they are, and reiterates God’s instructions. He reminds them that the covenant given to their fathers is for them as well.

And remembrance is part of thanksgiving. We have short memories—especially when we think about what God has done for us. Blessings are forgotten in the midst of hardships. The wilderness wanderings were a perfect example of this. The people went from joy to grumbling in just moments.

The best—or really worst—example of this is found in Numbers 21. Listen carefully to what they say. It is almost embarrassing how ungrateful they are. “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”

In light of this proclivity, Moses’ recitation of the commandments begins with the words of God, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” This is the basis for understanding and appreciating the Lord’s provision. God saved them. He rescued them. And Moses wants this generation to embrace the story of the Exodus from Egypt as their own story.

This is an interesting reading for Thanksgiving week. Moses goes on and on about food. God provided for them in the wilderness—at a time when they could not plant and harvest. And as they approach the Promised Land, they are still eating manna and quail. These were to be received as God’s good provision. Manna “was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” It sounds like the perfect thing to eat every day. Although we have already heard them call this food *worthless*.

But a feast awaits them. In the Promised Land they will find wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and honey await. Later, when they spy out the land, they will be

amazed by the variety of food the land provides. God invites them to enjoy the Mediterranean diet. He supplies with abundance. And notice that Moses even calls his hearers to bless the Lord—for what they find on their tables. It is the only right response.

But this is about more than food. This is an invitation into covenantal blessings. God has initiated the covenant. It all begins with His rescue—His salvation—out of Egypt. He takes them to Sinai. And He speaks with them there. He even carves the testimony Himself in stone.

And really, all the covenants that we find in Scripture—to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David—all contain future promises. They are never completely realized until Jesus. The New Covenant of Jesus is just the fulfillment of all that has come before. The Exodus account leads to Jesus.

Gratefulness is again the right response. But God’s promises are something in which we should walk. It is more than just a nod of agreement. There is a great invitation here—but it is an invitation to follow—to go where God is taking them. They have left Egypt—in the miraculous parting of the waters. And they will enter the Promised Land with the same miracle.

Jesus will call His disciples in much the same way. So, whether we are talking about the Twelve Tribes of Israel or the Twelve Disciples, they are called to walk in His ways. They are to go where He leads. Following is the nature of faith.

The Israelites can make a mess of their lives by ignoring God’s commandments. They can live like the nations around them. Remember that God was taking the land from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And not just randomly—but because they were under His judgment—because of rampant immorality and idolatry.

And so, the Israelites are forced to choose their path. They can violate His commands—they can kill, steal, and destroy—and live with the consequences. Or they can walk in His ways—finding His covenantal blessings.

And so, the wilderness wanderings—which were the experiences of this generation of Israelites—becomes a microcosm of life. And they were something of a test—as Moses says. Not that God doesn’t know how people will react to His covenant. Think of testing here as refinement. There are lessons to learn in the wilderness. God wants them to succeed. And these lessons prepare God’s people for the Promised Land.

And the central lesson here is found in verse three, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” Now, we know this verse better than most of the rest of Deuteronomy—because Jesus uses it. I bet you even remember the context.

We will hear this story at the beginning of Lent—in just a few months. We are in Matthew in this new church year. We find the details in Matthew 4. And here, Jesus is thrown out into the wilderness to wander for forty days. He is tested—even tempted by the Devil. And he does everything that the Israelites could not. He walks in the way of the Lord. He is Israel reduced to One. And He defeats temptation for us.

It is the first temptation that the devil sets before Him. And keep in mind that He has fasted for forty days. There has been no manna. No wheat, barley, grapes, figs,

pomegranates, olives, or honey. Just prayer—and the Word of God. Jesus enters into the disciplines of the Christian life. And it begins with His identity. Jesus knows who He is. The Father thundered forth the truth at His Baptism. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 4 reads like this, “And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Jesus has it within His powers to perform such a miracle. Later, with the whole concept of manna in the wilderness lingering in the minds of God’s people—He will feed five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Jesus does this for the sake of revelation. He invites them to listen to what He has said.

But in the temptation, Jesus knows that He doesn’t need to prove Himself to the devil. And He won’t use His power for selfish gain. And Jesus responds by quoting our passage from Deuteronomy. This demonstrates the connection between Jesus’ temptation and Israel’s experience in the wilderness. And remember, Israel was tested so that they would know that there are things more important than food. We have a much more fundamental need.

With the first temptation, the devil attempts to undermine the core of Jesus’ trust in the Father’s leading. But even though the present circumstances are dire—forty days is a long time—Jesus maintains that the essence of life is trusting God’s Word. He does not need to turn stones into bread to confirm who He is. And He doesn’t need to do so to supply His needs. God the Father will supply what He needs.

The Father has declared Him to be the Son. The Spirit has led Him into this difficult place. And Jesus Himself will not go contrary to the will of God. He must take the Father at His word—that He will take care of Jesus—even when His body is crying out for food. Jesus resists the temptation. He does nothing for selfish gain. He believes the Father—even while He is tempted.

Jesus rests in God’s promises. He is okay with waiting. He knows what the Father has said, “You shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.” And so, the Word of the Lord according to Moses—finds its place with Jesus—and thus with us, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

So, let’s pick up on a few things today from Deuteronomy as we prepare for Thanksgiving. Let’s remember what this reading is all about. Deuteronomy means *the repetition of the Law*. Deuteronomy is a series of three sermons delivered by Moses to the next generation of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land.

Things were difficult for the Israelites in the wilderness. God even tested them—with hunger and difficulty. But He does such things for their good. And the same is true for us. Things don’t have to go our way during Thanksgiving as a holiday. It is okay to make sacrifices for the good of others. And grumbling and complaining have no place.

Remember that true thanksgiving—thanksgiving with a small “t”—is about worship. It is not just a competition for who can be most grateful—and get the credit for it. It is not

getting what we want at the table—and forgetting that God is the one who supplied us with His rich blessings. It is about remembering His great salvation. It is about responding to the New Covenant in His blood. It is about living in His commands—walking in His ways.

It is the kind of remembrance that recalls God’s mighty deeds of deliverance—it recalls the ways in which He has sustained us. It sets God’s Word and promises before our eyes. And it is paired with the response that God gives. It is a life of obedient faith—following Jesus Christ—to the glory of God the Father.

Thanksgiving is about putting God’s own words in our mouths. That is why we are here today. That is why we have to sing. That is why we participate in the liturgy. We come to this place tonight to recognize that He is the One who provides. He blesses. He sustains us. And so, we remember, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*