

Deuteronomy 8:1-10
"Soli Deo Gloria"
Thanksgiving Eve

November 27, 2024
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"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 is in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Happy Thanksgiving Eve! Tomorrow is the day our republic has set aside to give thanks to our God. So, what are you thankful for?

In today's reading from Deuteronomy, Moses calls on the Israelites to remember Yahweh as the source of every good thing that Israel has and will have in the Promised Land. The nation of Israel's past, present, and future, are all under the care and promises of Yahweh.

But did they always remember that? Most often, they grumbled. They consistently grumbled against Moses and God. So many of them preferred slavery in Egypt than wandering those 40 years in the wilderness. Moses feared that God's people would forget about God.

So, God inspired Moses to say: ***"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. And 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 man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord"*** (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

In other words, God is saying: "Remember how these forty years I have led you and cared for you. I have protected you from the elements, fed you with manna and quail. It wasn't luxurious living, but I have brought you safely to the Promised Land. Yes, there were times of difficulties. Yes, you murmured and complained. I never forgot about you even through you thought I did. I did all these things so that you might be humbled."

When Israel stopped to think about all of this, they were moved to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

And what about you and me? As we step back and recollect, we remember those times when we were sick or discouraged. We remember those times when you thought no one really cared, including God. But as time went on, God helped you, encouraged you, healed you.

It is so easy to go on with our lives and forget to look back at the times God helped us through: those difficult times in our families, those financial struggles. But as we look back, we see how God worked His will in our lives, humbled us, and focused our attention back on Him again.

As you stop to remember, you may be surprised at how many reasons we have to be thankful to Him.

Look to your Baptism as you were adopted as a child of God, an heir to the promise. Look to the cross and empty tomb where your sins were forgiven through the blood and merit of Jesus Christ. Look to the Lord's Supper where Christ gives you His very Body and Blood under the bread and the wine, which forgives your sins and strengthens your faith to life everlasting. We have so much to be thankful for.

Like the Israelites who grumbled until they realized all that God provided in their lives, another man had reasons to grumble. By the age of ten, both of his parents had died. He experienced struggle after struggle with various trials. His wife would die leaving him as a single father with a house full of children. However, he would re-marry and be blessed with many more children.

Between all of that, this man was employed by the church. And he appeared to often lack patience. He served congregations playing the organ, but oftentimes the congregation would want him to direct the choir. And when things took a turn, again, he often lacked patience. At one such church, the choir demanded simpler music. He claimed that his aim was to create music to the glory of God. So, he left and took a new job at another church. This man would eventually write a new cantata each month. At his death, he composed more than one thousand albums to the glory of God.

Upon each of his compositions, this man wrote “J.J.” at the beginning and “S.D.G.” at the end. They are abbreviations for the Latin, “Jesus Juva,” which means “Jesus, help me!” and “Soli Deo Gloria,” which means “to the glory of God alone.” He hoped that when the music was played, it would point toward God.

He once said, “I play the notes as they are written, but it is God who makes the music.” His desire was to always glorify God.

If you haven’t caught on already, this man was the Lutheran composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

For anyone who has read through my sermons on wspop.org, you may have noticed what I have typed at the conclusion of my sermons. I have followed Bach’s tradition with “Soli Deo Gloria” — “to the glory of God alone.” I write those words as a reminder that I am a poor, miserable sinner who is nothing without God. I would have nothing to say without God. So, every sermon I preach is to His glory as I preach His Law and Gospel. It’s not about me. It’s always all about Jesus.

And like the Israelites and Bach, we will also face tests. As God humbled them, He is also humbling us.

So, remember where you are now. Israel could not have made it to the Promised Land without God. They made it because God cared for them throughout those forty years. He fed them, He clothed them. As Israel stood before the Promised Land, they were grateful for being where they were. They remembered to give God all the glory.

In Deuteronomy 8, God is tapping us on the shoulder and asking us if we have stopped to think about where we are today. What a privilege it is to hear the message of God’s love in Christ, to kneel at the communion rail and have fellowship with God. What a joy it is to hear those words of forgiveness pronounced over us!

Have you looked around and remembered all those people God has placed in your life here at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church and elsewhere who have had an influence on your life? As we ponder and remember, your hearts swell with thanksgiving.

And look at your personal life: your family, your home, your relatives and friends. Look at all that surrounds you. Look at all the blessings God bestows upon you as His daily bread: *“everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like”* (Luther’s Small Catechism: Fourth Petition).

We would have nothing without God. That is what God has done and is still doing for us today.

But there is more to come! *“For 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, and 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. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you”* (Deuteronomy 8:7-10).

The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. We will soon enter paradise.

As Christians, we know where we are going. Our future is certain. Jesus made sure of that for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Deuteronomy 8 reminds us that God has provided for us in the past, He continues to provide for us now, and because He is God, He will surely fulfill His promises for our future. He will fill your future with His love and His care. Our lives are sealed with the love of God that surpasses all human understanding.

Remembering that God is always with us, our heartaches turn to hope. Our difficulties turn into praise. Soli Deo Gloria: to the glory of God alone! Amen!

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +