

"REMEMBER, AND GIVE THANKS"
DEUTERONOMY 8:1-10
THANKSGIVING EVE
MESSIAH, BOERNE
NOVEMBER 22, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: DEUTERONOMY 8:1-10

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

OUR TEXT FOR THIS THANKSGIVING EVE EVENING IS ABOUT
TWO THINGS: REMEMBERING, AND GIVING THANKS. THE FIRST,
REMEMBERING, ISN'T ALWAYS EASY, ESPECIALLY AS WE GET OLDER.
YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE STORY ABOUT THE THREE MEN WHO HAD
LUNCH TOGETHER ONE DAY. THE FIRST MAN SAID, "SOMETIMES I
GO TO THE REFRIGERATOR, OPEN THE DOOR, AND FORGET WHAT IT
WAS I WAS GOING TO GET." THE SECOND MAN RESPONDED, "I KNOW
WHAT YOU MEAN. SOMETIMES I CATCH MYSELF ON THE STAIRS,
WONDERING WHETHER I WAS GOING UP OR DOWN." THE THIRD SAID
RATHER PROUDLY, "WELL, I DON'T RECALL HAVING ANY PROBLEMS
WITH MY MEMORY (KNOCK ON WOOD). . . OH, I THINK SOMEONE'S
AT THE DOOR." THERE'S ALSO THE STORY ABOUT THE OLDER
GENTLEMAN WHO USED TO BRAG, "I DON'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE WITH
MY MEMORY. FOR EXAMPLE, I CAN ALWAYS FIND MY CAR IN THE
PARKING LOT. IT'S THE ONE WITH THE LIGHTS ON."

WE CAN HAVE FUN WITH SUCH STORIES, BUT THERE'S A MORE

SERIOUS SIDE TO NOT REMEMBERING ALSO. FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE YOU EVER DONE SOMETHING FOR A FRIEND, ONLY TO FIND OUT LATER THAT HE OR SHE DIDN'T EVEN REMEMBER IT? OR HAS SOMEONE EVER MADE YOUR DAY BY REMEMBERING TO THANK YOU FOR SOMETHING YOU HAD DONE AND ABOUT WHICH YOU HAD FORGOTTEN? IN OUR TEXT THIS EVENING, GOD IS TRYING TO MOVE THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TO THANKFULNESS BY REMINDING THEM OF WHAT HE HAD DONE FOR THEM IN THE *PAST*, WHAT HE IS DOING FOR THEM IN THE *PRESENT*, AND WHAT HE PROMISES TO DO FOR THEM IN THE *FUTURE*. IN LIKE MANNER, AS WE GATHER HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH TONIGHT AND IN OUR HOMES TOMORROW, REMEMBERING GOD'S MANY BLESSINGS TO US—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE—MAY WE ALSO BE FILLED WITH THANKFULNESS TO GOD FOR ALL THE BLESSINGS WE HAVE RECEIVED AS HIS CHILDREN IN THIS GOOD LAND OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

FIRST OF ALL, GOD WANTS US TO REMEMBER THE *PAST—WHERE WE'VE BEEN*. IN OUR TEXT, GOD IS SPEAKING TO OUR SPIRITUAL FOREFATHERS, THE ISRAELITES. GOD SAYS TO THEM, "REMEMBER HOW THESE FORTY YEARS I HAVE LED YOU AND CARED FOR YOU. I HAVE PROTECTED YOU FROM THE ELEMENTS, AND FED YOU WITH MANNA AND POULTRY. IT WASN'T THE MOST LUXURIOUS LIVING, BUT I HAVE BROUGHT YOU SAFELY TO THE PROMISED LAND. THERE WERE TIMES OF DIFFICULTY WHEN I TESTED YOU AND DISCIPLINED

YOU. YOU MURMURED AND COMPLAINED, BUT I DIDN'T FORGET ABOUT YOU, EVEN THOUGH YOU THOUGHT I DID. ALL THESE THINGS HAPPENED TO HUMBLE YOU AND TEACH YOU, SO THAT YOU MIGHT REALIZE THAT 'MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD' " (V 3). WHEN ISRAEL STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT ALL OF GOD'S BLESSINGS, THEY WERE MOVED BY THE SPIRIT TO GIVE THANKS AND PRAISE TO GOD.

AS WE LOOK BACK ON THE HISTORY OF MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH, WE FIND THAT THERE HAVE BEEN GOOD TIMES AS WELL AS DIFFICULT TIMES. WE ARE "IN THE WORLD," AND SO OUR CONGREGATION IS AFFECTED WHEN OUR COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS, NATURAL DISASTERS, AND SPIRITUAL CONFLICTS IN THE CHURCH. THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES WHEN WE HAVE BEEN TESTED . . . AND HUMBLED . . . AND OTHERS WHEN SOME PEOPLE HAVE JUST THROWN UP THIER HANDS AND QUIT. YET, AS WE WORK TOGETHER AS A CONGREGATION, WE REALIZE THAT GOD HAS BEEN WITH US ALL ALONG IN OUR DIFFICULTIES TO TEACH US TO DEPEND ON HIM ALONE. THROUGH HIS WORD AND SACRAMENTS, GOD ASSURES US OF HIS LOVE AND GIVES US STRENGTH TO CONTINUE HIS MISSION AND MINISTRY TO OUR COMMUNITY. AS WE SIT HERE TONIGHT AND REMEMBER WHERE WE HAVE BEEN, OUR OVERWHELMING RESPONSE IS TO GIVE THANKS AND PRAISE TO GOD.

WE SHOULD HAVE THE SAME RESPONSE AS WE REFLECT UPON

OUR PERSONAL LIVES AS WELL. PERHAPS WE REMEMBER A TIME WHEN WE WERE SICK OR DISCOURAGED, OR WHEN WE FELT AS THOUGH NO ONE CARED ABOUT US. AS TIME WENT ON, HOWEVER, GOD CAME TO US, PERHAPS THROUGH ANOTHER PERSON, AND HELPED US, ENCOURAGED US, AND HEALED US. IT'S EASY TO GO ON WITH OUR LIVES AND FORGET TO LOOK BACK AT THE TIMES WHEN THE LORD HELPED US—TIMES OF DIFFICULTY, PERHAPS, WITH OUR FAMILY, HEALTH, FINANCES, OR FAITH. AS WE LOOK BACK AT THOSE TIMES NOW, WE SEE HOW GOD WORKED HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES, HUMBLING US, AND TAUGHT US TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON HIM AGAIN. AS WE REMEMBER OUR BAPTISM, WHEN GOD BLESSED US WITH THE BENEFITS OF BOTH THE CROSS AND THE EMPTY TOMB, WE REALIZE JUST HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US AND HAS FORGIVEN US OUR PAST MISTAKES. INDEED, WE ARE HERE TONIGHT WITH HEARTS FILLED WITH THANKS AND PRAISE, AND WE CONFESS WITH ST. PAUL, "IN ALL THINGS"—BOTH GOOD AND BAD—"GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (ROM 8:28).

SECONDLY, GOD WANTS US TO THINK ABOUT THE *PRESENT—WHERE WE ARE HERE-AND-NOW*—AND IN SO DOING, RECOGNIZE THE TREMENDOUS BLESSINGS WE HAVE. MOSES, THE PROPHET OF GOD, SPOKE TO THE ISRAELITES AND SAID, "NOW YOU ARE CLOSE TO THE PROMISED LAND. IT'S JUST ACROSS THE JORDAN RIVER. NOT ONE OF YOU COULD HAVE MADE IT BY YOURSELVES. YOU ARE ALL HERE

BECAUSE GOD HAS CARED FOR YOU THESE 40 YEARS. HE FED YOU, CLOTHED YOU, AND UPHELD YOU." AS ISRAEL STOOD BEFORE THE PROMISED LAND, THEY WERE VERY GRATEFUL FOR BEING WHERE THEY WERE. REMEMBERING THE PAST AND THINKING ABOUT THE PRESENT, THEY GAVE GOD THE CREDIT.

THROUGH OUR TEXT TONIGHT, GOD IS "TAPPING US ON THE SHOULDER," SO-TO-SPEAK, AND ASKING US IF WE HAVE STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT WHERE WE ARE TODAY. FOR EXAMPLE, HOW WOULD WE HAVE FELT IF WE CAME TO CHURCH TONIGHT AND FOUND IT BOARDED UP? WHAT IF ALL OUR BIBLES AND HYMNALS HAD BEEN GATHERED TOGETHER AND BURNED UP? WHAT A PRIVILEGE WE HAVE TO GATHER IN THIS CHURCH, TO HEAR THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S LOVE IN CHRIST, AND TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LIVING GOD AND ONE ANOTHER! WHAT A JOY TO HEAR GOD'S WORDS OF FORGIVENESS PRONOUNCED OVER OUR SINFUL LIVES. HAVE YOU TAKEN A MOMENT TO LOOK AROUND HERE AND NOTE ALL THE PEOPLE GOD HAS USED TO POSITIVELY INFLUENCE YOUR LIFE—PEOPLE WHO ARE READY TO REACH OUT AND HELP YOU AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST? REMEMBERING THESE THINGS MAKES OUR HEARTS SWELL WITH THANKSGIVING.

JUST LOOK AT YOUR PERSONAL LIFE—YOUR FAMILY, HOME, AND RELATIVES. LOOK AT ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT SURROUND YOU IN

THIS WORLD: OXYGEN, WATER, SUNSHINE, FOOD, AND MATERIAL POSSESSIONS. AS YOU SURVEY YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL LIFE, TOO, YOU CAN SEE GOD'S CONTINUING BLESSINGS—EVIDENCE THAT HE LOVES YOU IN SPITE OF YOUR FAULTS AND WEAKNESSES. WHEN WE DO THIS, WE SUDDENLY REALIZE THAT NONE OF THE THINGS WE HAVE WOULD BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT A GOD WHO LOVES US. SO, WE SHOUT OUT, "THANK YOU, LORD, FOR ALL YOU'RE DOING TO HELP US RIGHT NOW!"

FINALLY, GOD WANTS US TO THINK ABOUT THE *FUTURE—WHERE WE ARE GOING*. GOD TELLS THE ISRALITES THAT HE IS BRINGING THEM INTO A GOOD LAND, A LAND WHERE THEY WILL "LACK NOTHING" (V 9). READING IT, WE MAY SAY, "THAT SOUNDS LIKE HEAVEN," AND WE'D BE RIGHT! AS CHRISTIANS, OUR FUTURE IS CERTAIN. WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING. JESUS MADE IT SO FOR US BY HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION TO THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND.

OUR TEXT REMINDS US THAT GOD HAS KEPT US IN THE PAST, HE CONTINUES TO KEEP US IN THE PRESENT, AND BECAUSE HE IS FAITHFUL, HE WILL SURELY FULFILL HIS PROMISES TO US IN THE FUTURE. GOD WILL FILL YOUR FUTURE WITH HIS LOVE AND CARE. THERE'S NOT DOUBT THAT HE WILL BRING ABOUT HIS GOOD PLAN FOR OUR LIVES, AS LUTHER WRITES, "HERE IN TIME AND THERE IN ETERNITY" (SC III, 8). OUR LIVES ARE SEALED WITH GOD'S

LOVE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HOLY BAPTISM. REMEMBERING THIS,
OUR HEARTACHES TURN TO HOPE, OUR DIFFICULTIES TURN INTO
REASONS FOR PRAISE, AND OUR LIVES TURN INTO THANKS-LIVING!

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, GOD SHOWERS HIS BLESSINGS ON
THE WHOLE WORLD, "EVEN TO ALL EVIL PEOPLE" (SC III, 13).
OUR GOSPEL LESSON CONCERNING THE TEN LEPERS REMINDS US,
HOWEVER, THAT FEW PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD RESPOND WITH SINCERE
THANKSGIVING (CF. LK 17:18). ONLY THE FAITHFUL, THOSE WHO
BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AS THEIR GOD AND SAVIOR, RESPOND IN
TRUE THANKSGIVING. THEREFORE, TONIGHT, AS WE REMEMBER HOW
MUCH GOD HAS BLESSED US IN THE PAST, BLESSES US IN THE
PRESENT, AND PROMISES TO BLESS US IN THE FUTURE, LET'S BE
GRATEFUL. GOD HAS BLESSED US SO THAT WE MAY BE A BLESSING
TO OTHERS. SO, LET'S *REMEMBER, AND GIVE THANKS. AMEN.*