

Sunday, November 22, 2020 – Last Sunday of the Church Year & Thanksgiving
“Remembering the Promise”

Deuteronomy 8: 1-10

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Adapted from CPR

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

The act of remembering is not always easy for people, especially as we get older. Three older men were conversing over lunch. The first said, “Sometimes I go to the refrigerator, open the door, and forget what I was going to get.” The second responded, “I catch myself on the stairs, wondering whether I was going up or down.” The third said somewhat proudly while knocking on wood, “I don’t recall any problems with my memory... oh, someone is at the door.” Another absent-minded person said, “I can always find my car in the parking lot. It’s the one with the lights on.”

Have you ever done something special for a friend, only to find later that they don’t even remember? Or has someone made your day by remembering to thank you for something you did? In our text God is trying to move us by his love to remember what he has done for us in the past, what he is doing for us right now, and what he will do for us in the future. As we stop to remember, we will be surprised how many reasons we have to be thankful to him.

Let’s start by remembering where we’ve been. When I say we I refer to the people of God, collectively. “We” means God’s people dating back through the Old Testament. God says to our forbearers in Israel, “Remember how these 40 years I have led you and cared for you. I have protected you from the elements, fed you with manna and birds. It wasn’t luxurious living, but I have brought you safely to the Promised Land.” “There were times of difficulties. You murmured and complained. I did not forget about you even though you thought I did. All of these things happened so that you might be humbled.”

When Israel stopped to think about all of this, they were moved by love to give praise and thanks to God. How much more today for us during our current walk in the wilderness!

We can apply this to Mountain View as well. There have been times of hope, joy and promise and times when we have been humbled. This year it seems we’ve experienced the highs and lows of all of those years rolled into one. Perhaps even times people have wanted to throw up their hands and quit. Yet we’ve been built together into this body of Christ, His Church.

As we worked together we understood clearly that God was with us in our difficulties. As we sit here today and remember His faithfulness that has brought us to this point, our one overwhelming response is to give praise and thanks to God.

And then there's our personal lives. As we step back and recollect, we remember when we were sick or discouraged, when we felt as if no one really cared. As time went on God, perhaps through another person, helped us, encouraged us, healed us.

It is easy to go on with our lives and forget to look back at the times the Lord helped us through—the difficulties with our families, finances, jobs, etc. Now as we look back, we see how God worked his will in our lives, humbled us, and focused our attention on him again. As we focus on our Baptism, on the cross and the open tomb, we know that God loves us and has forgiven our past mistakes. We are here today with hearts exploding with praise and thanks. We say with the apostle Paul, "In all things (both the bad and the good) God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28).

Even as we reflect back on where we've been, we also take time to reflect on where we are now. Israel, our spiritual ancestors had such a moment of reflection as they drew close to the Promised Land. They were reminded – Not a single one of you could have made it by yourselves. You are here because God has cared for you these 40 years. He fed, clothed, and upheld you. As Israel stood before the Promised Land they were very grateful for being where they were. Remembering, they gave God the credit.

So too here at Mountain View – the events of this year have shown how easy it is to take for granted gathering, and being and doing without the various challenges and logistics and planning. We've got it easy compared to Christians in other times and places. What if we arrived to find the building boarded up, our stream shut off. If Bibles and religious books had been gathered and burned? What a privilege it is to hear the message of God's love in Christ, to receive Jesus' body and blood and have fellowship with the living God! What a joy to hear the words of forgiveness pronounced over our sinful lives. Have you looked around and remembered all the people God has gathered here that have an influence in your life—people that are ready to reach out and help you as brothers and sisters in Christ? Remembering makes our hearts swell with thanksgiving.

And then there's our personal lives – look at your family, home, and relatives. Look at all that surrounds you: water, oxygen, sunshine, and material possessions. As you survey your own spiritual life, you can see God's continuing blessings—evidence (but not proof, which is in the means of grace) that he loves you in spite of your faults and weaknesses. Suddenly we begin to realize that none of the things we have now would be possible without a God who loves us. We shout out, "Thank you, Lord, for all you're doing to help us right now!"

And on this last Sunday of the Church Year, we also remember where we are going! When you hear that description of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy doesn't it sound a lot like the new heavens and new earth? As Christians we know where we are going. Our future is certain. We, forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection, raised in baptism, are among the sheep. And when we confess, "Lord, when did we do these things for you," we will hear those words of comfort, giving us credit for what He did to make even our tainted works good in His sight – "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." Jesus has made that sure for us by his suffering, death, and resurrection. Our text reminds us that God has kept us in the past, he continues to keep us in the present, and because he is God, he will surely fulfill his promises for our future. He will fill your future with his love and care. There is no doubt that God will bring to pass his good plan for our lives—and our lives eternal. Our lives are sealed with the love of God, and the resurrection of Jesus – because of that we know that our hope is not in vain! Remembering this, our heartaches turn into hope. Our difficulties turn into praise. Our lives turn into living thanks to God.

On this occasion of celebrating Bonnie Karner's retirement and God's work through her teaching career we see an example of our thanks toward each other in everyday life that points forward to the work that God has done. I'm sure there were times over the years Bonnie where you felt unnoticed or unappreciated, but that in no way took away from the wonderful things God was doing through you. In the same way today, God's work continues with or without our thanks! We join together, "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you"). In Jesus' name, Amen.