Sermon | Thanksgiving Eve

TEXT: Dt. 8:1-16; Mt. 14:32-39

23 Nov. 2016

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.

Thanksgiving is always an act of remembering. When we give thanks to God, we are remembering all that God has done for us in the past, and all that the Lord has promised to do for us now, and in the future.

Thanksgiving is about **remembering**: because the danger for God’s people is always the danger of **forgetting**, that we will forget the Lord, and all that he has done for us. And in so forgetting, we lose our faith in God, and we begin to trust and rely on ourselves.

The danger of forgetting: this was the danger that Moses spoke about in our Old Testament for today. Deuteronomy is the last book of Moses. Moses wrote it when he was old, after all the events of the Exodus had happened. And look at what Moses says to the people of Israel who are now, very soon, going to inherit the Promised Land. Moses says, verse 11: “*Take care lest you forget the Lord your God…who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*.”

“Don’t forget all that God has done for you, all the mighty miracles that the Lord worked to save you his people.” And we remember all that God did in that great Exodus story: how he called Moses from the burning bush, to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let his people go, how he sent Ten Plagues on the Egyptians, how he gave them the Passover Lamb so their children would be spared from the angel of death, how he gave them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground, while the Egyptian soldiers with their chariots and horsemen were swept up by the waves and destroyed, how he fed them manna in the wilderness, and gave them to drink of the water from the rock in the desert.

The Exodus was the greatest event in the Old Testament. It was the Lord’s salvation, for his people. And it was the chief type of our salvation in Christ, who redeemed us from an even greater slavery—our slavery to sin and death, by the shedding of his blood, so that we might be God’s redeemed people, headed out of the wilderness of this life, to the Promised Land of eternal life.

But think back to Israel. God’s people Israel didn’t always remember what God did for them. In fact, they so often forgot the Lord. We read how they looked back, longing for the cucumbers and fleshpots of Egypt, how they grumbled against Moses: “Why did you take us out into the wilderness to die?” And so, the Lord punished them, once sending fiery serpents which bit the people, so that some of them died. And those forty years in the wilderness, was God’s punishment for their forgetting.

Moses and a whole generation of the people of Israel would never see the Promised Land, because they forgot, how God defeated Pharaoh and his army, how he opened the sea, how he had been providing for them all along. It wasn’t so much that they didn’t know these things happened. But they somehow let their flesh take over and forgot that God actually loved them, and was worthy of their trust.

Now let’s do a little self-examination. Do you ever worry? Do you ever get scared of the future? Does your heart become filled with anxiety, when you think about tomorrow? And you and I, we’re not strangers to the Lord’s Word. We’ve heard his promises many times, how he said, “Consider the birds of the air and the grass of the field. If God takes care of them, how much more will he take care of you?” But what’s the problem? The problem is forgetting. And when we forget the Lord, we fall into worry and anxiety, which is really a lack of trust that God is our God, and he will keep his Word. And so, just like the Israelites forgot the Lord, we can find that same forgetfulness in our own hearts too.

In the second reading for today, from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 15, we get the story of the Feeding of the Four Thousand. And the main point of this story is that Jesus is the same God of the Old Testament, who provided for his people then, and who continues to provide for his people now. And in this Feeding of the Four Thousand, we see many similarities to the wilderness wandering: how these crowds find themselves in a desolate place, how the disciples grumble against Jesus—“where are going to find enough bread?” And how Jesus gives them bread, just like God gave manna to Israel, so that we might learn to trust and believe that Jesus is that same Creator God who is here to meet the needs of his people.

And when we look at Jesus, we find one person who never forgot, not even for a moment, to give thanks. When Jesus took the fish and the seven loaves—what did he do first? He gave thanks. And that reminds us of another meal, the one he gave on the night in which he was betrayed. Before he gave them the bread, and said, “This is my body,” and, before he gave them the cup and said, “This is my blood,” what did he do? He gave thanks. And why did he give thanks? Because Jesus was a man of perfect faith. In Jesus we find the one person who always remembered and never forgot the love that his Father had for him and for the whole world. And so as Christians, we learn to give thanks from our Lord Jesus.

Did you know that the meal we share together as Christians, which sometimes goes by different names, like the Sacrament of the Altar, or the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, is also sometimes called the ‘Eucharist?’ And that Eucharist is a words which means ‘giving thanks.’ Because when we come to the Lord’s Table, we’re remembering all that Jesus did for us. Just like the people of Israel celebrated the Passover every year, and by their yearly remembrance, recalled the mighty acts of God’s deliverance, so that they would never forget the Lord’s salvation, in the same way, we come to the Lord’s Table remembering the mighty acts by which God delivered us from sin and death—how Christ was crucified for us, how he was raised for us. We come remembering what this meal is: the very crucified and risen body and blood of our Savior. This is a meal of remembrance. As Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” And so, as a meal of remembering, it is therefore a meal of thanksgiving. It is a Eucharist, a thanksgiving to the Lord, because to be thankful is to remember the Lord’s goodness to us.

And so tomorrow, as we gather around our hearths for a feast, let us remember the many blessings we have in our lives by the grace of God: family and country, the bounty of the harvest. And as we consider life’s great blessings, let us remember that we are in no way self-sufficient men and women who have earned such things for ourselves, but that we are simply recipients of the Lord’s mercy, and he has given all things to us for the sake of his Son, in whose blood we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Let us remember that the eyes of all look to the Lord, for it is he who gives food at the proper time, it is he who opens his hand to satisfy the desires of every living thing. For from the heart that remembers this flows true gratitude and gratefulness and thanksgiving. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.