

“Deep Gratitude”
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday October 8, 2023

Deut. 8:7-18

*"Thank you for all you do for me, Lord.
And for all you do for this restless world I live in.
For the life you create and sustain.
For your love which holds and feeds me,
And gives me strength.
For your activity underlying the universe,
Gradually, patiently, working out your purposes- in spite of all I do to help!*

*And thank you for what you are, not just for what you do.
Thank you. For being the strong ground in which I sow my life,
The sure goodness in which all good is rooted,
And the love from which all love is harvested.*

*Lord, there is a time to work
And there's a time for waiting,
A time to let your love soak in.
Sinking into the hot dry earth of my being.
Cooling, refreshing, renewing." (Eddie Askew Disguises of Love)*

If I had a prayer for you, for all of us today, it would be that in this time of worship, and over this holy day time that "God's love for you might soak in, that it might sink into the hot dry earth of your being, cooling, refreshing and renewing you."

How many of you will enjoy some extra time off work this weekend?
How many of you would say that this weekend will be at least as busy as normal for you?

Our scripture reading from Deuteronomy is from the time when the people of God finally were finished their time in the wilderness.

They were about to enter the promised land; the land God was giving them. They were going from the desert wandering, where life was uncertain, and hard, where they couldn't set down roots, and they were going into the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where they would plant crops and eat them, where they would build houses and live in them.

God promised he would bless them in their new land.

They would mine iron and copper from the hills, have herds of animals, fields of barley and wheat, gold and silver, figs, olives and pomegranates, milk and honey; they would lack for nothing.

But there were at least two dangers in the new land... the first is that the people would become forgetful of the commands of God.

In the wilderness, the people relied on God daily. God provided them with Moses as their leader, the Ark of the Covenant, a sign of God's commands travelled with them in the centre of the group, their life was focused on living God's commands. They travelled together in a tight knit community, and daily they were reminded about God, and how they were living as God's people, a people separate from the rest of the world.

In the promised land they would spread out, trade with their neighbours, learn to live in the midst of other peoples, intermarry with them, learn of their gods.

It would be much easier to forget God's commands, forget God's ways, and eventually forget God. They would forget how God taught them to live and forget to live as God's covenant people.

We are a people very prone to forgetting... we forget the wisdom of yesterday, we forget what is important, we forget who we are, and who were meant to be.

"The mistake a lot of politicians make is in forgetting they've been appointed and thinking they've been anointed."

It's not just politicians who forget who they are and how they've gotten to the place where they are today.

As Robert Louis Stevenson said: *I've a grand memory for forgetting.*

One of the causes of our forgetfulness of living as God's people is being busy. The people in the promised lands were going to have homes to keep, fields and flocks to tend, trade to do, hills to mine, money to manage...

A prosperous life is a busy life...

Life today, prosperous or not, can be a busy life.

Any of you know about a busy life? Any of you not know about a busy life? Many people suffer from some called "FOMO" which is the Fear of Missing Out. We're afraid our kids won't get every enriching experience, that we might miss out on some special something, so we fill our schedules, and our family and kids schedules to the max.

When we are busy, or at least too busy, our focus can become narrow - whether it is finishing a project, earning more money or dealing with a difficult relationship, or even just getting everyone where they need to be. Being so busy makes it hard to see the wholeness of life.

If your head is always down at the desk - or you're stuck in the kitchen, or you're simply going from one busy work or activity to another, you can't see the whole, the wonder, the beauty, the gifts of God that surround us.

The Bible reminds God's people that our lives are to have a rhythm, work and rest, and holy days where we pause and look up from all our labours and remember with joy and wonder and gratitude.

We pause with wonder at the beauty of God's creation.

The table and sanctuary remind us, so that we are not forgetful about the bounty of the earth.

Consider all the foods, the flavours, the textures, the colours, the varieties that will be on our tables this weekend. At the market the other day I was struck by the abundance of variety of food that God has blessed us with.

At home later that evening, I could remember nine varieties of apples.

Our God is a wondrous Creator... who blesses us extravagantly. God is not exacting or harsh, giving barely enough, tight fisted and limiting. But God is gracious, raining down varieties of blessings, as the rain waters the earth.

Our Scriptures this morning invite us to come to God and remember to offer our gifts of thanks to God. We are invited to commit our lives to God and God's service, but God in Jesus has committed his life, to us first.

How can we look at any of our children without wonder and awe?
How can we think for a moment that we have accomplished all of anything?
In the words of Deuteronomy, how could we say to ourselves "my power and the might of my own hand have got me these things."

We draw breath by the grace of God, we have strength and some measure of health by God's gift, we have freedom to worship, hearts that have the capacity to love and praise, worship and wonder, to remember the meaning of our days, and the God who has blessed us with each gift.

"Remember the Lord your God." Remember it is God who has blessed you with all the sights and sounds, the joys the pleasures, the smells and tastes, the friendships, and family, with the breath you will inhale in this moment, and the gift of Jesus who came to bring us life in abundance.

Do not be afraid of missing out.

Do not be afraid to focus on the few things that are needful.

Stop and give thanks, remember who you are, remember all is God's gift.

Let the love of God, our great God wash over you, renewing, refreshing, remembering the goodness we have received, the grace like rain that revives our very souls, even the blessings we receive this day. We are here today to give thanks with deep gratitude for all God has done.

Thanks be to God.