

Thanksgiving Day C
Deut 26:1-11
The Rev. Bonnie Underwood
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Giving Thanks

I don't normally preach from the Old Testament, but this week I was struck by the lesson from Deuteronomy, an ancient lesson used to teach how to give thanks.

The book of Deuteronomy can be considered a book of rules, of how to live, but this 26th chapter is a little different. It's a confession of God's people, a description of how they should identify themselves and their loyalties. Today's lesson begins by reminding God's people that once they've settled into the land God is giving them for their inheritance, they should take the time after the harvest to give thanks.

And as they give thanks, they are charged with remembering their past, for they too were once strangers, aliens, who were treated harshly and oppressed. But the Lord God heard their cries of distress and brought them out of bondage, into a land overflowing with milk and honey. So together with priests and the strangers among them, they are called to give thanks and celebrate all that the Lord has given, for they are God's chosen people.

Through these words, we can learn about being thankful to our Living God.

- First, we're encouraged to remember that all we have is a gift from God. The earth, our land, our own gift of life, what we think of as our possessions — all we have is a precious gift from our Creator
- Second, God is with us throughout our life journeys. God is with us in those happy times times of abundance and God is with us in our distress. God sees us, hears us, and knows our needs
- And finally, it's important to take the time to look at our lives, to recall our gifts, to recognize our blessings, and give thanks. It's important to celebrate the bounty given to us by our Loving God and share God's love and abundance with others.

Do we take the time to see all that God has given us? Are we actually aware of our many gifts and blessings? I imagine it's impossible to be completely aware. It would be a kind of sensory overload, if we were even to begin to sense even a fraction of what God has given us.

All that is around is a gift from God. We can get a minute sense of God's abundance, just by taking a quick look around this sanctuary. I love to look at those hills beyond these windows, with the trees and their kaleidoscope of colors, the beauty of the sky. And we're seeing just a tiny slice of this beautiful world.

And we know as peer through these windows, that they're man-made things, a part of this beautiful church, provided to us by those given the skills and abilities to build. And as we shift our gaze to closer to the altar, we can see the gifts God has given to others. Like the artistic gift of Brother Kenneth, who has shared God's gift by drawing our icons. And the gift of welcome and hospitality in the work of the Altar Guild and Flower Guild as their remarkable attention to detail and tender care of the space helps to insure that we are fully prepared to lead beautiful and orderly worship each and every week.

And behind us there's the organ and the piano that Jeff uses as he leads the choir to share God's gift of music, filling this space with joyful music and song.

And those beautiful new doors behind us that lead us out into the world, to share God's love with the wider community and give us the opportunities to carry God's gifts of light and life into the greater world.

And this is just a beginning of seeing God's gifts, for I haven't mentioned all of you — all of the gifts and blessing you have been given and that you share with one another and the greater community, to the glory of God.

By recognizing God's gifts, by beginning to see the extent of God's immense love for each of us, we can begin to move into a deeper sense of gratitude — the kind of gratitude that pushes us to look beyond ourselves and our individual concerns and instead leads us towards caring about the greater community, leads us towards engaging in the well-being of all God's people, and calling us to reject the worldly idea that some must be left behind, rejected, neglected, or somehow "othered" in order for us to become more. When thanksgiving is genuine, when we begin to recognize the magnitude of our blessings, we can't help but share our gifts with others.

I've recently read a reflection on thanksgiving that said, "true gratitude is a gift of yes -- yes to life, yes to blessing, yes to God, yes to possibility, and yes to others . . . gratitude is the awareness that we can shape our lives to bless and heal and love out of the bounty we have received."

God has said yes to us, his beloved people. God has graciously given us, in God's infinite love, the gift of the Bread of Life. We are given all that we need out of God's love for us.

So, today, I encourage us all to recall our many blessings, to remember that God is with us, and to joyfully to give thanks. For we have been blessed with the gift of life in Christ, and with the help of our Lord and Savior, we are strengthened and encouraged at this table, to both give thanks and share God's love beyond these walls as we go out into the world. Amen.