

DEUTERONOMY 26: 1-11

MARCH 10, 2019

“FIRST FRUITS”

AS WE BEGIN WORSHIP TODAY WE STEP FOOT ONTO A JOURNEY OF FORMATION AND PREPARATION AS WE AGAIN APPROACH THE SEASON OF LENT.

IT IS A SEASON WHERE WE AS CHRISTIANS, BOTH NEW AND OLD, SEEK WAYS TO DRAW CLOSER TO GOD AS WE MOVE TOWARD THE SACRIFICE AND TRIUMPHANT ACTS MADE ON OUR BEHALF.

IT IS THAT PERIOD OF 40 DAYS FROM ASH WEDNESDAY THROUGH THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT THAT CARRIES US TO HOLY WEEK.

HISTORICALLY, IT IS A TIME OF PRAYER AND FASTING WITH MANY CHOOSING TO ADD A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE TO ASSIST IN SHARPENING OUR FOCUS IN DAILY LIFE.

WE ARE CALLED ONTO THIS PATHWAY BY *GOD* THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES IN ASH WEDNESDAY AND THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

WE CONTINUE THIS PROCESS BY OUR OWN SELF-EXAMINATION AND REPENTANCE, TRADITIONALLY LENT WEEKS 2 AND 3.

WEEKS 4 AND 5 PROVIDE A TIME OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD AND WITH ONE ANOTHER, AS WE PREPARE TO PUBLICLY PROCLAIM OUR BELIEF IN THE RISEN CHRIST. IT IS A JOURNEY THAT WE SHARE BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY.

THE TRADITIONAL LECTIONARY READING, NO MATTER THE LECTIONARY YEAR, BEGINS WITH A GOSPEL READING BEING THAT OF THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS BY THE DEVIL.

IT IS PERHAPS WHERE SOME OF OUR IMPRESSIONS OF RESISTING TEMPTATIONS RESTS.

IT IS ALSO WHERE I BEGAN MY STUDY IN PREPARATION FOR OUR TIME TOGETHER.

AFTER ALL, ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT IT APPROPRIATE FOR A LENTEN SUNDAY TO FOCUS ON CHRIST.

I ENTERED INTO THE STUDY WITH AN EYE TOWARD LOOKING CAREFULLY AT WHAT SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WOULD HELP ME TOWARD A CENTERED FOCUS FOR THIS TIME IN MY LIFE.

HOWEVER, PLACES I LANDED AND THOUGHTS THAT I HAD ABOUT WHAT WOULD FOCUS MY UPCOMING

**WEEKS LEFT ME FEELING EMPTY AND ALMOST
PRETENTIOUS.**

**IT SEEMED TO BE AN ATTEMPT TO FULFILL A
PRESCRIPTION RATHER THAN AN ENGAGEMENT WITH
GOD AND AN ENHANCEMENT OF THIS PERIOD OF
REFLECTION TO FURTHER APPRECIATE EASTER.**

**AND SO, MY LENTEN SEASON BEGAN WITH A NECESSITY
BY ME OF EXPLORING WHERE I WAS AND WHAT
OBSTACLES I WAS CREATING THAT BLOCKED MY
PATHWAY.**

**WHAT WERE THE STUMBLING ROCKS OR PERHAPS
BOULDERS ONTO WHICH I WAS TRIPPING?**

**THUS, MY PRE-LENTEN EXPLORATION BEGAN WITH AN
HONEST LOOK AT WHO I WAS AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME
IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

**I FOUND THAT I HAD MOVED FROM THE HOLIDAY RUSH
WITH ALL ITS HUSTLE AND BUSTLE, JOYS AND STRESSES
INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH A CENTRIFUGAL FORCE THAT
PLUMMETED ME INTO THIS YEAR.**

**MY INNER CENTER, INSTEAD OF FINDING ME WITH A
LULL AND THAT SLOUGH LIKE ATTITUDE OF EVEN
BOREDOM, WAS CONTINUING FORWARD AS IF IT WAS
STILL HOLIDAY MODE.**

I WON'T BOG YOU DOWN WITH ALL THE DETAILS OF MY PERSONAL LIFE BUT WHAT I FOUND WAS THAT LIFE FORCES OUTSIDE OF ME HAD BECOME MORE HECTIC THAN PAST YEARS, DESPITE MY RETIREMENT STATUS. THERE WERE THE WONDERFUL EVENTS OF NEW DUTIES, NEW FRIENDS AND NEW EXPLORATIONS. THESE WERE ADDED TO THE POIGNANCY OF GOOD BYES AND THE UNEASINESS OF TRANSITIONS. MY OWN PERSONAL LIFE BROUGHT ADDITIONAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT FOR MORE THAN A MOMENT TOOK AWAY MY BREATH. ALL OF WHICH BROUGHT ME TO LENT WITH A NEED FOR GOD TO CALL ME INTO THIS TIME WITH A NEW VOICE. AND SO, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED. I HAD CONTINUED MY STUDY AS I WAS GOING THROUGH THIS SORTING PROCESS. AS IS MY USUAL WAY OF PREPARING FOR A SERMON, I HAD READ AND STUDIED ALL THE LECTIONARY READINGS. AND THERE NESTLED AMONGST THEM WAS THE OLD TESTAMENT READING.

AN OLD TESTAMENT READING THAT AT FIRST SEEMED A PERSONAL ANSWER AND EVEN A QUESTIONING OF WHETHER TO USE IT AS A SERMON BASIS.

AN OLD TESTAMENT READING THROUGH WHICH GOD CALLED ME BACK.

“WHEN YOU HAVE COME INTO THE LAND THAT THE LORD GOD IS GIVING YOU AS AN INHERITANCE TO POSSESS, AND YOU POSSESS IT, AND SETTLE IN IT, YOU SHALL TAKE SOME OF THE FIRST OF ALL THE FRUIT OF THE GROUND, WHICH YOU HARVEST FROM THE LAND THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GIVING YOU, AND YOU SHALL PUT IT IN A BASKET AND GO THE PLACE THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL CHOOSE AS A DWELLING FOR HIS NAME.”

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY CONTAINS THE ORATIONS OF MOSES, DECLARED TO THE ISRAELITES ON THE LAST DAY OF HIS LIFE AND AS THEY PREPARED TO ENTER THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY.

AFTER 40 YEARS OF WANDERINGS, HIS SPEECHES FOCUS ON THE COVENANT THAT GOD HAD ESTABLISHED WITH THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS, THE LAWS OF THE

COVENANT, AND AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF OBEDIENCE TO THOSE LAWS AS A CONDITION FOR ENJOYING THE COVENANT.

MOSES IS PREPARING THEM FOR A LIFE AHEAD BUT IN A CONTEXT THAT WILL SHAPE WHO THEY ARE IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

TODAY'S READING DEUTERONOMY 26: 1-11 OFFERS AN UNDERSTANDING AND THE LITURGY OF THE FIRST HARVEST DURING WHICH AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS WERE TO BE BROUGHT TO THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. THIS OFFERING PROVIDED BY GOD, THROUGH THE GIFT OF THE LAND, WOULD CONFIRM THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM.

LISTEN TO THAT LITURGY FOUND IN DEUTERONOMY 26:3-11:

*YOU SHALL GO TO THE PRIEST WHO IS IN OFFICE AT THAT TIME AND SAY TO HIM, "TODAY I DECLARE TO THE LORD YOUR GOD THAT I HAVE COME INTO THE LAND THAT THE LORD SWORE TO OUR ANCESTORS TO GIVE US."
WHEN THE PRIESTS TAKES THE BASKET FROM YOUR HAND AND SETS IT DOWN BEFORE THE ALTER OF THE LORD YOUR GOD,
YOU SHALL MAKE THIS RESPONSE BEFORE THE LORD YOUR GOD,
"A WANDERING ARAMEAN WAS MY ANCESTOR;
HE WENT DOWN INTO EGYPT AND LIVED*

**THERE AS AN ALIEN, FEW IN NUMBER,
AND THERE HE BECAME A GREAT NATION,
MIGHTY AND POPULUS.**

**“WHEN THE EGYPTIANS TREATED US
HARSHLY AND AFFLICTED US, BY
IMPOSING HARD LABOR ON US,
WE CRIED TO THE LORD, THE
GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS;**

**THE LORD HEARD OUR VOICE AND
SAW OUR AFFLICTION, OUR TOIL,
AND OUR OPRESSION.**

**THE LORD BROUGHT US OUT OF
EGYPT WITH A MIGHTY HAND
AND AN OUTSTRETCHED ARM, WITH
A TERRIFYING DISPLAY OF POWER,
AND WITH SIGNS AND WONDERS;
AND HE BROUGHT US INTO
THIS PLACE, AND GAVE US THIS LAND,
A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.**

**SO NOW I BRING THE FIRST FRUIT OF
THE GROUND THAT YOU, O’ LORD,
HAVE GIVEN ME.”**

**YOU SHALL SET IT DOWN BEFORE
THE LORD YOUR GOD AND BOW
DOWN BEFORE THE LORD YOUR GOD.
THEN YOU, TOGETHER WITH THE
LEVITES AND THE ALIENS WHO RESIDE
AMONG YOU, SHALL CELEBRATE
WITH ALL THE BOOUNTY
THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD
HAS GIVEN TO YOU AND YOUR HOUSE.**

ACCORDING TO JEWISH TRADITION FIRST FRUITS WERE MADE OF SEVEN SPECIES NATIVE TO THE LAND, WHEAT, BARLEY, GRAPES, FIGS, POMEGRANATES, OLIVES AND DATES.

THE LITURGY PROVIDES BOTH WORDS AND ACTIONS TO BE PERFORMED.

IN ACTION WE CAN VISUALIZE THE WORSHIPING ISRAELITES STANDING IN THE SANCTUARY HOLDING THEIR BASKETS OF FIRST FRUITS AND AS THE PRIESTS RECEIVES THE BASKETS AND PLACES IT IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR, WE CAN HEAR THEM OFFER THE LITURGICAL RECITATION.

THE WORDS THEY WILL RECITE REACH BACK INTO THEIR HISTORY, THE LIVING STORY OF THEIR ANCESTORS.

IT BEGINS WITH THEIR INITIAL HOMELESSNESS AND ANCHORS THEM WITH THE WANDERINGS OF JACOB. IT MOVES THEM THEN TO COMMUNITY THROUGH THE MIGRATION TO EGYPT WHERE THEY LIVED AS ALIENS.

IT CONTINUES IN RECOUNTING THEIR SUFFERING IN EGYPT WHERE THEY WERE TREATED HARSHLY.

IT REMEMBERS THEIR ANGUISH AND THEIR CRYING OUT TO THE GOD OF THEIR ANCESTORS.

IT CONCLUDES WITH THE REDEMPTION FROM THE ENSLAVEMENT.

BY ANCHORING IT INTO A HARVEST OF FIRST FRUITS IT GROUNDS IT INTO A NEW LIFE.

AS A WANDERING TRIBE ONE CANNOT POSSESS LAND THAT GROWS CROPS.

THE RECITATION ALSO LEAVES THE OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND WITH GOD AND INSTRUCTS A SHARING OF THE FRUITS WITH THE PRIESTS WHO COULD NOT GROW CROPS AND THE WANDERING ALIENS WHO HAD JOINED IN AND FOR WHOM CARE WAS NEEDED.

NICK CARTER IN FEASTING ON THE WORD, SAYS IT THIS WAY:

THIS IS THE CLIMAX OF THE EXODUS STORY.

“IMAGINE THIS: AFTER THIRTY-NINE YEARS, ELEVEN MONTHS, AND ONE WEEK IN THE WILDERNESS, THE ISREALITES ARE GATHERED ON THE PLAINS OF THE MOAB, POISED TO ENTER THE PROMISED LAND.

AFTER NEARLY FORTY YEARS OF FEELING LOST AND UNSURE, HAVING HAD TO LEARN A MOUNTAIN OF LAWS AND RULES, AFTER BEING CHASTISED FOR

***BAD BEHAVIOR (OFTEN WELL DESERVEDLY!)
AND AFTER HAVING SPENT A GOOD DEAL
OF THEIR SOUJOURN BEING CONFUSED,
UNDERFED, AND POORLY HOUSED-
WONDERING WHY THEY HAD LEFT
EGYPT IN THE FIRST PLACE-
HERE THEY SIT ON THE HIGHLANDS
OVERLOOKING THE JORDAN RIVER VALLEY,
THE PROMISE LAND LYING IN THE DISTANCE!
EVERYTHING THEY HAD ENDURED, WORKED
AND SACRIFICED FOR IS AT LONG LAST WITHIN
THEIR REACH. THE SENSE OF GOD’S GRACE
AND BLESSINGS IN RETURN FOR THEIR
FAITHFULNESS MUST BE OVERWHELMING”***

**OUR LENTEN LESSONS IN DEUTERONOMY THEN OFFER
US IN ITS FULL CONTEXT, AN INSTRUCTIVE PICTURE AS
WE SEEK TO BE FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD.**

**PERHAPS WE ENTER INTO LENT THIS YEAR BY LAYING
THE FOUNDATION OF GOD’S GIFTS TO US.**

**PERHAPS WE CAN BE CALLED INTO THIS TIME WITH A
REMINDER OF WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE IN OUR
LIVES.**

**AND SO, LET’S BEGIN OUR LENTEN JOURNEY BY
SPENDING TIME LOOKING AT OUR OWN STORY AND THE**

**STORY OF OUR ANCESTORS IN THE HISTORY OF OUR
FAITH, BOTH PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL.
AND IN THAT REMEMBERING, LET US BECOME AGAIN
AWARE OF THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GIFTS TO US AND
THE GRACE THAT HAS BROUGHT US TO THIS SPOT.
LET US FILL OUR BASKETS TO OVERFLOWING AND AS WE
GO THROUGH THIS LENTEN SEASON KEEP OUR EYES
OPEN TO WAYS IN WHICH GOD IS LEADING US.
AMEN.**

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