

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 22, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Deuteronomy 8:7-18 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The name Deuteronomy in Greek means “second law”. Before crossing into the promised land, Moses gives the people Deuteronomy which reminds them of all the events in Exodus and Numbers. As his final sermon, Moses wants the people to remember who brought them out of Egypt, who led them through the wilderness, and who was giving them the promised land. Moses knew how quickly people tend to forget God when things are going well. How they begin to tell themselves that it was by their own talents, wit, strength, or abilities that they have success. It is easy to forget God and place ourselves as “masters of our own destiny” when that destiny looks good. Once God is forgotten, however, everything that was achieved soon begins to implode. The word in verse 11 translated as “forget” is more than just a mental exercise. In the Hebrew, to forget also means to wither away. When we forget the source of all goodness, we cut ourselves off from that goodness and begin to die. In the Greek, the word used for “forget” also means to neglect or overlook. To “forget” God is to neglect both our past relationship with God and our future relationship. In the context of Thanksgiving when we forget to give thanks to God for all that has occurred in the past year, we are cutting ourselves off from seeing the blessings of the coming year.

Deuteronomy 8:17 Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.”

When has your pride preceded your fall?

Has your pride ever cost you a relationship or an opportunity?

Do you agree that pride causes more regrets than humility?

If “thanksgiving” is the first step towards humility, how can you be more thankful?

Commentary on Matthew 25:31–46 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

In the context of Ezekiel and Ephesians, the parable of the sheep and the goats takes on a deeper meaning with the LORD Jesus as the shepherd and the sheep under his protection at his right hand. Jesus as the Son of Man takes the throne to judge the nations (see Daniel 7:13-14). The tradition of mixing goat and sheep herds during the day was common in the Middle East. At the end of the day, however, goats were separated out because they could not endure the cold nights while the sheep were allowed to pasture. The image would have been familiar but the lesson would have shaken some of the listeners. In all the Gospels, the commandments to love God and love our neighbors were lifted up by Jesus as the core of the law. In this parable, Jesus goes one step further by associating the Son of Man with the neighbor, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Loving our neighbor is loving God! This is a radical challenge to the pervasive religious view that those who suffered, the least, were cursed by God. In the parable, the ones who are cursed are not the least but the people who showed the least compassion.

Matthew 25:40 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Can you find the grace in this passage or only judgment?

Does it bring comfort or fear that the judgment is the one we pass on ourselves?

Does this illustrate the prayer “forgive us as we forgive others”?

What does it mean that neither the goats or sheep remember their actions?

Could it be that the goats were blinded by selfishness and the sheep simply did the “right thing”?

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Chapter 8 and 9 are written in the context of a fund raising campaign for the church in Jerusalem. Paul argues that while Macedonia is poor they have given much and now it is time for the Corinthians to give. This is not just a matter of money, however, but there is a spiritual reason to give which he explains in our reading today. Just as in the parable of the talents, those who invest or "sow" will reap bountifully but those who bury their talent or "sow sparingly" will reap sparingly. Paul then quotes the Septuagint in verse 7 when he says "God loves a cheerful giver". Because the Jewish people were scattered all over the known world some 150 years before Jesus, seventy (septa) scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. In the Greek translation, Proverbs 22:8 says "Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. God blesses a cheerful and giving person and brings futility to the one who doesn't."

2 Corinthians 9:7 "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Do you give from a place of obligation or of joy?

Is giving in response to an action or an act of faith in the future?

Do you give to a church, a pastor, a cause, or to what God is doing?

Is giving just about money or is about our lives ... time, energy, etc.?

Sermon "Steps Toward a Thankful Heart" ([Sermon Video](#))

In a year like 2020 where we are still in the midst of issues that we hoped would have ended long ago, it may prove challenging to celebrate Thanksgiving. For those that can safely gather around the table and share a meal, they may find it difficult to engage in conversation that doesn't divide. It is exactly at these moments when we need to be reminded of what it takes to have a thankful heart.

Moses proclaims to the people that once they enter the promised land there will be so many reasons to give thanks. This thanks, however, can be stolen if we forget the source of all our blessings. If we allow our pride and independent nature convince us that we "earned" our blessings than we will soon forget our God. The first step in having a thankful heart, therefore, is to humble ourselves and remember that God alone is the source of all blessings. If we have been able to prosper through skill and hard work, it is God who gave us the talent, health, and opportunities to prosper. Without these, all that we tried would have failed. Humility is the first step of a thankful heart.

This humility can be seen in the actions of the sheep in Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats. Both the sheep and the goats were given opportunities to love Jesus and neither recognized Jesus when they came upon those opportunities. For the goats, these opportunities appeared as distractions and a waste of time and money for people that most likely were reaping what they had sowed. If those people lived a godly life, than they wouldn't be in prison or hungry or a stranger. Their own pride in their accomplishments kept the goats from seeing the opportunities to love Jesus.

The sheep, on the other hand, didn't see Jesus but rather saw people who were in need. Through their humility, they could see themselves in all those who were suffering. They could not walk away but rather compassion drove them to do something. The sheep didn't go looking for opportunities but when those opportunities presented themselves, the sheep responded with love. By loving those in need, they loved Jesus. This is the second step towards a thankful heart - compassion. Compassion places us in another person's shoes. It curbs the sharp tongue of criticism and the hardness of judgment. It leads us to treat others as we would want to be treated if we were in their place.

When, through humility, we begin to have compassion for those without, we begin to realize how much

we have actually be given. Even the smallest of things can be a huge blessing when seen through the eyes of those who have nothing. Humility and compassion move us from the fear of scarcity to the joy of abundance. This abundance overflows from a cheerful heart that counts every blessing as a precious gift. This is the final step of a thankful heart - cheerful giving. The paradox of our faith is that the more we give out of a thankful heart, the more blessings we receive. Our humility moves our focus from ourselves toward God. God directs that focus to those in need. Driven by compassion, we cheerfully give because we have been so blessed by God. By cheerfully giving, we become a blessing and thus more people join the road towards a thankful heart.

Especially in times like these, we need to cultivate a thankful heart in ourselves, our families, and in our community. Rather than focusing on the scarcity, let us count our blessings and share what we have so that everyone may have a thankful heart. Have a blessed Thanksgiving!