

Lenten Devotional February 27, 2021

Scripture

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

18 You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. 22 If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you. 26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

Devotional

The Rev. Alan Olson '14

I love the Book of Deuteronomy. As I write, I can almost see a meme on Facebook that reads: “I love the Book of Deuteronomy!” Said no one ever.” There’s a lot of material in Deuteronomy that fits into a very old, and mistaken, impression that the God of the Old Testament is angry and vengeful, more concerned with obedience to the law than with grace and mercy. That’s the danger of a superficial reading of any text, especially Deuteronomy.

The name Deuteronomy means “second law”; it’s a retelling or resetting of the law of Moses. It was written for a people who were constantly turning away from God, a people who failed to put their full trust in God and then created idols for worship.

The God who is speaking in this passage is inviting Israel, the chosen people, to return to a righteous relationship with God. God is offering Israel yet another chance to turn back to God. That’s the grace. Sometimes we get hung up on the curses and we forget about the grace and the blessings.

God’s blessings are not a reward for obedience. We live into God’s blessings when we turn toward God and away from the idols we make and worship. The curses happen not because God is punishing us but because we turn our focus to the idols we make: money, work, activities, and general busyness, to name a few. When we focus on these things, we’re not busy looking to God. We build stumbling blocks. We trip. We fall. We fail to get out of our own way.

In this season, let us look within and search for all the idols and stumbling blocks that we create, all the curses that we heap upon ourselves. Let us look for ways to smash these idols and turn back toward God—the God who tells Abraham that his children will be a blessing to the whole world—so that we may live more fully into God’s blessings, and then share those blessings with the world.

Prayer

God of grace and mercy, in this season of Lent, we ask that you open our eyes and ears and hearts. We ask that you let us see all our idolatries, so that we may repent and return to you. We ask that you pour out your Holy Spirit, so that we might see all those with whom we can share your blessings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.