

Lenten Devotional February 22, 2021

Scripture

Deuteronomy 8:1-20

1 This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. 2 Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. 3 He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. 4 The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you. 6 Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. 10 You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. 11 Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. 12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, 16 and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. 17 Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." 18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. 19 If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Devotional

The Rev. Sarina Odden Meyer '07

Many of us have experienced a wilderness in life—a time of trial or difficulty that forced us to drill down to the essentials of who we are, especially we who are in Christ. That is what the Israelites experienced in the wilderness. They were totally dependent on God. Their dependence was always at the forefront of their minds, because they were literally helpless without God's provision (vv. 2-4). As they neared the land of plenty, God exhorted them to continue to follow God's commandments, to continue to live in the fear of the Lord (v. 6).

Living in the fear of the Lord is a liberating concept. It is an invitation to worry only about what God thinks over and above what anyone else thinks, even ourselves. Times of wilderness are often blessings that bring us back to the essentials of who we are in Christ. It's times of plenty that we have to worry about. In times of plenty, we think we can strike out on our own and live by the bread we make with our own hands. Instead of blessing God for all that God has given to us (v. 10), we go astray, no longer living for God but living for ourselves or other people. Verse 11 reminds us as we approach a time of plenty, "Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God."

God has called each one of us uniquely to participate in the redemption of the world. When we forget God and start living for other things or other people, we forsake that which God has uniquely called us to do. During Lent, let us fast from the fear of other people, the fear of other things, even the fear of our own thoughts. Let us instead turn back to God and live in the fear of God only by remembering that “one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (v. 3).

Prayer

Gracious God, you know how easy it is for us to be driven by the fear of other people, other things, and even our own thoughts. Help us to be motivated instead only in fear of you. Help us to see that fearing you is an invitation to living fully into the calling you have uniquely given to us. Help us to seek you in times of wilderness *and* in times of plenty, so that in all the times we live through we will faithfully reflect your love in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.