

November 22/23
Deuteronomy 8:1-20
Mange Tusen Takk
Rev. Susan Bresser

Remember the Thanksgiving when Grandma & Grandpa came over the river and through the woods to your house and got caught in a freak blizzard? I remember thinking we'd never see Grandma or Grandpa ever again, but eventually they showed up. Remember when we didn't have cell-phones to check on those traveling?

Remember the Thanksgiving when the dog ate ½ the turkey and laid on the kitchen floor moaning, belching and passing gas and your parents scrambled to make the other side of the bird look presentable?

Remember the year you went to the neighbors for Thanksgiving and their parakeet flew around the dining room while you were eating. Remember when you left their house and your mother said "never again will we eat Thanksgiving dinner with them" ... apparently she had a hard time eating her bird while another flew around her head.

Remember the time when you and your brother accidentally dumped the goldfish food into the casserole your mother was preparing for Thanksgiving dinner ... and you didn't eat any, but you watched everyone else eat it and compliment your mother on how tasty it was? And remember it wasn't until you and brother were adults when you told her?

Ahhh, Thanksgiving memories. It's important to remember. That's the whole theme of our scripture today. Remembering ... well, maybe not about holiday faux pas, but certainly about remembering what God has given us. Traditionally Thanksgiving is a time of remembrance; a time of remembering how God has cared for us and continues to provide for us.

The words from our scripture today are: "Don't forget, don't forget, don't forget ... don't forget God, your God, who delivered you from slavery, provided you with food, gave you life and breath and being." Don't forget.

The people of Israel are told to remember because they often forgot.

After the Israelites left the very distressing time in the desert, they settled down in the more stable environment of Canaan. There they faced new and more subtle dangers. They fled the oppression of Pharaoh, and it was God – their God, our God – who fought for them because they couldn't fight for themselves. But as they settled on their new land they had less and less need for God to fight battles for them.

They had wandered homeless in the desert for 40 years and God had taken care of all their needs. But after settling in the land promised to them, they could build their own homes and raise their own food. The people who had earlier depended on God's cloud and pillar of fire for guidance and God's manna for daily survival now had military power of their own and warehouses full of food. The people had once looked to the God of their Ancestors, the God of the Mountain, the God of the Desert, the God of

deliverance to help them in their time of need. But now, settled comfortably in their new land, they were often chastised for choosing other gods.

They forgot. They just forgot.

The further they moved away from the harsh realities of slavery, the less they thought they needed God. The more self-sufficient they became, the more they forgot God – the God who created them and the God who gave them freedom. Self-sufficiency can be dangerous when one forgets about God.

It amazes me how the ancient text – the text from Deuteronomy – can still speak to us today. God knows the tendency of human beings is to forget. God knows that when things go well, we generally forget about the God who gave us life. God knows we often look to lesser gods to fill our emptiness. God knows that being thankful is not one of our greatest gifts.

Scripture, old but still very much alive – tells us that God wants us never to forget that it is not by our power and our strength that we exist as God's people, but only because God has extended grace even to the least of us.

Do we deserve it? No. Do we get it? Yeah.

We have a lot to be thankful for: the clothes on our backs that keep us warm, the food in our cupboards, the houses we live in and the families who nurture and comfort us. In this country we are blessed with a wealth of material and political blessings that people in other countries only dream of.

By third world standards even the poor in America are rich. And we take for granted liberties that are revolutionary in other parts of the world. And we are healthy enough to gather here together for worship. We have a lot to be thankful for.

I sound like my mother ... “you have a lot to be grateful for, Missy ... and I just hope you realize that.” I remember the times when I was an ungrateful 14 yr old, when I was an ungrateful 18 yr old, when I was an ungrateful 25 yr old, when I was an ungrateful 40 yr old. I remember the times when someone else had to put me in my place – usually my mother – telling me that just because I was born, didn’t automatically mean I was entitled.

Raising kids these days can be difficult ... I imagine it’s been difficult throughout all of history, but raising kids nowadays feels as if our value system is being compromised all the time. Our culture is one of entitlement and our children live that and experience that. I don’t have any answers, only to keep reminding them: “you have a lot to be grateful for, Missy.” I say a lot of prayers that as our children grow into adults, they will begin to understand how full their lives are because of God’s goodness and because God’s grace. My mom probably said the same prayers.

We have a lot to be thankful for, but we all have times in our lives when saying thank you does not come easy. This life of thanksgiving can be difficult. I say that because quite frankly when *I’ve had it up to here*, I find it difficult to say: “oh, thank you, God.”

When I’m in a situation that is uncomfortable or angry at my kids for doing something brainless

or upset at my dog for having escaped, once again running off to school, I have difficulty saying thank you.

Instead of wanting to sing praises of thanksgiving to God, I would much rather feel sorry for myself,
I would much rather yell at my kids for simply being kids
and I would much rather throttle the dog, because I know that when Brigit escapes and runs off to Northside she is not going to come home any smarter than she was before she left.

How about you? Do you have a faith that is thankful for everything?

Listen to the words of this modern day parable:

One afternoon a shopper at the local mall felt the need for a coffee break. She bought herself a little packet of cookies and put them in her purse. She then got in line for coffee, found a place to sit at one of the crowded tables, took a magazine out of her bag, and began to drink her coffee and read. Because it was so crowded, a gentleman, taking his coffee break, sat down across from her at the same table and began reading his newspaper. After a minute or two she reached out and took a cookie. As she did, the man sharing the table with her reached out and took one, too. “What nerve,” she thought, but she didn’t say anything. A few moments later, she took another cookie. So did the man sitting across the table from her. Now she was getting a bit upset, but still didn’t say anything.

After having a couple more sips of coffee, she again took another cookie. So did the man. She was really upset by this – especially since now only

one cookie was left. Before she could say anything, the man took the last cookie, broke it in half, offered it to her and ate the other half himself. Then he smiled at her and, putting his paper under his arm, got up and walked away.

She was fuming mad. Her coffee break ruined, already thinking how she would tell this offense to her friends, she folded her magazine, opened her purse and discovered her own unopened bag of cookies.

I hear a message in this story. It reminds me of how well God treats me even when I'm not in a place to think of or even remember how important God is to me. It also makes me think about the times I don't really appreciate what I have and I forget – far too quickly – where it comes from.

Thanksgiving is the time of year when we intentionally say thank you to God ... but really, every time we worship we say thank you – I hope we say thank you – because every time we worship we tell the stories that encourage us to remember –
to remember how much God loves us,
to remember our blessings,
to remember the faith, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
to remember how to treat others,
to remember to share God's blessings and God's bounty,
to remember to sing praise to God because we are God's children.

The title of this message is Mange Tusen Takk. Why Mange Tusen Takk? Are there any Norwegians in the house? Mange Tusen Takk is Norwegian for Thank You Very Much. I come from the land of Stoughton, yah (in my

best Norwegian accent) and I know the importance of Mange Tusen Takk. It just sounds so much worldlier than “thank you very much.” (It’s funny how we say “Stoughton” with a Norwegian lilt ... when Stoughton is actually an English name. Mr. Stoughton founded the community and just let the Norwegians in!) So, Mange Tusen Takk to God!

We gather to give thanks. We gather to say Mange Tusen Takk! We gather around God’s table to give thanks and to remember and to enjoy one of the most filling thanksgiving dinners we will ever need. We hear those words, “do this in remembrance of me” and we are thankful because the one who created us, the one who loves us, comes to live among us, bringing the promises of a God who will not leave us or ever give up on us.

Let us give thanks and let us remember. Amen.