

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost ✠

August 28, 2005

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.” (Deut. 8:10-18, NIV)

Some people have said that the twentieth century brought more change to our world than any other century in the history of the world. Do you believe that? Certainly the past century was filled with great changes. But has there really ever been a century without change? Has there been any one person’s lifetime that was not filled with change?

The century in which our sermon text takes place could also be called a century of change. The children of Israel were about to enter into the promised land, the land that God had promised on oath to Abraham and his descendants. Forty years earlier they had traded slavery in Egypt for wandering in the desert. And now things were about to change again—this time for the better. They were entering a good land, a fertile land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, when things were about to significantly improve, God through Moses reminds the people of this: **When you come into the new land, don’t forget the Lord. Always remember to Give Thanks to the Giver—the one who gives you everything you need—the one who gives you everything you have.**

The people of Israel had been in the desert for a long time. In fact, most of these people had been in the desert their whole lives. This was all they knew. But you can just imagine how much these people would have looked forward to entering the promised land. No more searching for food and water. No more moving from place to place. Now they could settle down and put the past behind them.

But God says, not so fast. When you enter the land, don’t forget where you came from. When you have everything you need, give thanks.

Otherwise, ... your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your

fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you."

When things are going well for you, don't forget what the Lord gave you. When you were suffering as slaves in Egypt the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. When you were in the middle of a desert that was vast and dreadful—and you didn't know where you would go and how you would escape its dangers, the Lord led you. When you were thirsty, when there was no water, the Lord gave you water. When you were hungry he gave you something to eat. He did all this, Moses said, **"to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well for you."**

The Israelites did not leave Egypt because of their own will and determination. The Israelites did not make it through the desert with their own ingenuity and strategic planning. The Israelites did not stay hydrated by water conservation—there was no water. In all these things **the Lord gave to his people exactly what they needed**—to humble them and to test them. To show that they couldn't do it on their own. They couldn't produce water where there is no water—but the Lord could. And he did. He gave to his people exactly what they needed.

We would probably have to admit that we do not have the same kind of needs that the people of Israel had in the desert—or rather, that all of our basic physical needs have been met. We have food, water, shelter. We live in a nation that allows us freedom to live and work, to worship and to recreate. But that doesn't mean that we do not go through times as trying and as humbling as the people of Israel did.

Sometimes jobs are taken away. Sometimes investments lose. Sometimes accidents happen and sometimes criminals take everything. Some illnesses just won't go away. Some diseases will never go away. Some family situations seem hopeless. Some relationships end. Sometimes loneliness does not end.

The Israelites were on their way *out* of the desert and you may be right in the middle of it. You don't know where to turn and frankly, you're not even exactly sure what it is that you really need.

But the Lord knows. He *"knows our needs and well provides our."* Just as the Lord provided exactly what his people needed in the desert, he gives us exactly what we need, even though we might not know what that is. And just as the Israelites did not even know what manna was, we may not recognize how God is providing exactly what we need at exactly the right time. But we know that he gives to us just as he gave to the people of Israel—"so that in the end it might go well for you."

When the Israelites entered the promised land, things were going to be different. Now that they were going to have everything they needed (and more), Moses gives them another reminder: Give thanks to the Giver—the one who not only gives you what you need, but who also gives you what you have.

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God."

If you forget the Lord who gives you what you *need*, you will forget the Lord who gives you what you *have*. Just think for a minute about all the things they would have. Good land, plenty of food, fine houses, herds and flocks, silver and gold. What great blessings! Could they even ask for anything more? Hardly! They had everything!

Does it sound at all familiar? Now, we may not be rich. We may not have everything we would ever want. But take some time and take a look at all the things you have that are blessings far beyond what you need. You don't need a newer car but you might have one. You don't need big screen television (you probably don't need a TV at all) but you might have one. You don't need the best tools, toys, or games, but you may have some of them. What blessings those are!

And God says to his people, when you have more blessings than you can even count—don't forget me. Don't forget the Giver—the one who gives you everything you need and everything you have.

And we may say, "Lord, we would never forget you." And the Lord speaks to us directly and says, **"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today."**

We know that it is the Lord who gives us all that we have.. And we would never claim that we deserve the credit for what we have. Even professional athletes will sometimes say that their abilities have been given by God.

But God isn't primarily concerned with what you say, but what is in your heart. He says **"your heart will become proud"**, and **"you may say to yourself (literally, to you heart), 'My power, my strength.'"** It's in our hearts that our sinful nature secretly desires the credit for what God has done. Maybe that shows itself when it feels like the stuff we have makes our lives complete. Or maybe the pride in our hearts shows when we make sure that everyone knows what nice things we have. The truth of the matter is that when our stuff makes us proud, we are making our stuff into our god. It's no wonder that God strongly warns us in the verse just after our text. **"If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed."** To forget the Giver is really to deny him, and to reject the blessings he gives.

Did you notice that Moses spoke these words before the Israelites had even stepped foot in the promised land? Before they had experienced any of the land's richness the Lord knew exactly what would happen. He knew that people's hearts would be filled with pride. And yet, the Lord still richly blessed his people. They did enter the land and they planted and harvested, built and lived there. God still gave them everything they had, which was more than they needed.

When we look into our hearts we can see pride as well. And yet is there anything that the Lord has not given to us? Did the Lord ever look to us and say, "I can't give him anything. He hasn't given anything to me." No, God gives us everything we have. God gave us **life**, not by our choice, but as a precious gift. God gave us **bodies** to live in, **families** to live with, the **means** to make a living. And on top of all this are those many things that we enjoy above and beyond the basics. And even when we make a mess of his gifts, he keeps giving. Because we sinned, he *gave* his one and only Son to live in our place and die in our place. He *gave* us new life when he made

us his own in Baptism. He gave us his very own body and blood to eat and to drink. **He gives and he gives and he gives.**

What shall we say? Thank you hardly seems adequate. How fitting then, that the words that are used here for “remember” is more than just a mental activity. God remembers us by keeping his promises. We remember him by putting to use the things he has given to us. God has given you a voice, and you may use that gift to pray, praise, or proclaim. God has given you certain skills and you give thanks to God by using those gifts to serve God and your neighbor. God has given you financial gifts and you may give thanks by putting them to work in God-pleasing ways. Above all these things, God has given us abundant spiritual blessings. We give thanks to God by remembering what he has done and by believing it.

No matter what the economy is like, it seems that there are some who would like it to change and others who would like it to stay the same. Even if the economy was always the same (which it is not), there would always be people who are in need and people who have plenty.

At any given point in our lives, I think we could find both of those sentiments in ourselves. There may be things that are lacking as well as great blessing for which we give thanks. And so the two-fold reminder that Moses gives to the people of Israel is applicable to us at all times. **At all times we can give thanks to the Giver.** He is the one who (in times of need) gives us everything we need. And he is the one who (when we have more than we need) gives us everything that we have. May our lives be filled with active expressions of thanks to the one who gives us all things. Amen.