

You Shall Rejoice in All the Good

Lent 1

Pastor Josh Frazee

Deut. 26:1-11

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.” We learned these words in our catechism classes. They come at the end of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed. But they should come at the end of every challenge that the Lord brings us through—indeed, every day, every hour, every minute.

In the First Article we are reminded of all the things God the Father does for us out of His “fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.” What are these things? That God has made you and me and every other living being. He has given you your soul and your body, with every part with its own function for your use, from eyes to ears to every other member, including your brain so that you have reason and can interpret all your senses. He has given you these and continues to grant you daily bread so that they continue to function for you.

God has also given you and me “clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all (we) have. He richly and daily provides (us) with all that (we) need to support this body and life.”

He has and continues to defend us “against all danger and guards and protects (us) from all evil”—especially the Evil One.

Do you remember to thank God for these things? When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and told them that they were slaves—referring to sin—the Pharisees respond that not only were they not slaves then, but that they had never been slaves to anyone. How quickly they forgot. Today we turn to the Old Testament text to see what the response of the Pharisees’ ancestors, having just been delivered from slavery to Egypt, was commanded to be.

Verse 1

“When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, you shall take some of the first of the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, “I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.” Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God.”

The Lord God commanded that He should receive the firstfruits of the crop of the Promised Land once He would have delivered the Israelites into it. He knew that the intentions and thoughts of the heart of humanity were nothing but evil. Yet He promised to take His people into a new land, one full of milk and honey. And soon the Lord God would fulfill that promise. Just as in every covenant in the Old Testament, the Lord God fulfilled His part. Out of His “fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.” So the Lord God commanded that it should be remembered with the offering of the first fruits of the Promised Land.

Yet how quickly the fact that God had delivered them into the Promised Land was lost on the Israelites! How quickly they went to worshipping other gods! How many times did the people do evil and sin in the sight of the Lord their God! Their history is full of it!

What about your history? What about your life? Is it full of thanksgiving to God for all that He has done? Or, like the Israelites, does your thanksgiving only sit at surface level? Is it easily forgotten? Do you

rather go after your own ways—your own gods? As Jesus said, one can only be a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. What or Who are you a slave to?

Verse 2

“And you shall make response before the Lord your God, “A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us up out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.””

Perhaps the Israelites could have forgotten having been slaves if they had only been told to say to the priests that the Lord God had brought them into a Promised Land. Yet here we hear that they had to speak the whole account to the priests as they were giving their firstfruits—all the way from “A wandering Aramean” through “the Egyptians treat(ing) (them) harshly” to “the Lord brought us up out of Egypt with a mighty hand” and finally to “a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Again, there may be something to say for just going through the motions. If someone only goes through the motions long enough, they might forget the significance of what is being said. It could be compared to a child responding to a parent, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, I’ve heard all that before...”

So why did God command the Israelites to say these things every time they brought an offering? It wasn’t for them to get tired of hearing it; instead, it was so that they might remember His great love for them. To put it another way, do you ever get tired of watching your favorite team on the TV? Or of hearing your spouse tell you “I love you”?

One could perhaps make the argument that saying “I love you” too often makes it somehow less special. So then why not just watch three Cardinal or Cubs games a year? That would certainly make those three games more special, right? No? You don’t want to do that? Why not? Because you love every one of them? Just as you love hearing your spouse say “I love you” every time? And that’s why God commanded that the Israelites say so much every time they gave an offering, so that they would be reminded that He loved them.

Verse 3

“And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.”

As we heard earlier, all that the Lord God, our Heavenly Father, has done for us has been out of His great love for us—for you and for me. Everything He has given us—of which we only return a small portion, even if we tithe, because all that we have is His anyway. We used to sing it when offerings were brought forward at St. John’s in Beardstown—the very words of David himself—“We give thee but Thine own whatever the gifts may be. All that we have is Thine alone; a trust, O Lord, from Thee.”

So why did God give so much good to the Israelites? Why does God give us so much good? He commands “you shall rejoice”, but has He not done enough for us to rejoice without His command?

He has given us our spouses, land, animals, and all that we have, our reason and senses, and still takes care of them. Yet even more than that, God sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to live and to die and to rise again. He sent Him to die because we are all sinners. None of us is any better than the Israelites who complained throughout their days of travel or the Pharisees who had forgotten that they had been in slavery and that the Lord God Himself had brought out their ancestors. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die in your place for your sins—and He has.

So why did God do it? Why did He send His own Son to die for you? “All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in (you or) me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.