

“Rejoicing in the good God has given us”

November 21, 2010

Text: Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Philippians 4:4-9

I.

As people of faith, friends, everyday our prayer should be,
Thank you God for the abundant blessings of this day!

Because, the truth of our lives is: we have much to be thankful for—always, more than we realize, more than we take time to remember. For us modern citizens of the world—with all the new technologies swirling around us, with all of our busyness, our hurry here, hurry there—Thanksgiving is a wake-up call.

Our reading from **Deuteronomy** illumines this. It challenges the modern culture of all ages when our priorities get twisted and reversed. It asks the question,

What happens to our soul and our sense of self when our priorities are forever organized around material possessions and market values and financial security?

And then, again, it challenges us with the question: *Isn't there more to life than making sure all of our barns are full?*

II.

Our reading from **Deuteronomy 26** is a reminder to all of us to remember who we are ... to remember the sheer goodness of God, to say nothing of the goodness of other family members who have gone before us. It's a reminder and an invitation to *count our blessings*.

This is the case because—like us—Israel, with whom God has this special historical relationship, has a tendency to forget. Again and again throughout the story of God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures, the biblical writers and the prophets remind Israel of God's acts of deliverance—of God's mighty deeds through the years.

For there was a time, lest we forget, when the Israelites were down in Egypt, suffering under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh ... and the Israelites cried out to God ... and God heard their voice and saw their affliction ...

And God, through Moses, brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand—with a terrifying display of power. And this same God has, now, given them the *promised land*, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Deuteronomy wants Israel to remember this ... to never forget. And as an act of thanksgiving for God's tender mercies, **Deuteronomy** wants Israel to take some of the first of all the fruits of the earth and set them before the Lord ... and bow down and give thanks ...

And you shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given to you and to your family.

Rejoicing in all the good God has given us ...

III.

Some years ago, there was a man named Claude, living with his wife and 6 children in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Just before school was set to start, as it turned out, all of his children were in need of new shoes. At the same time—suddenly—the washing machine wore out; and to top it all off, due to the bad weather, his work as a carpenter had dwindled to almost nothing. Tough times seemed all about.

Eventually, they were able to scrape together enough money to buy the children the shoes they needed. However, to obtain a washing machine, Claude decided to put an ad in the local newspaper to hopefully buy one second hand.

A few days later, the phone rang and it was someone selling a used washing machine. Going over to look at the machine, Claude couldn't help notice how this family seemed to have everything. He was envious. Soon, after agreeing on a price and on how he was going to transport the machine to his home, the conversation got around to children.

Claude, who had been out-of-work, began complaining about how expensive it was to raise 6 children, especially when they all needed shoes at the same time.

Hearing this, the woman of the house suddenly ran out of the room crying. Her husband explained that they had only one child who had been paralyzed from birth and had never been able to wear a pair of shoes.

Deeply moved by their story, when Claude got home later that day, immediately, he gathered up all the worn-out shoes of his 6 children—worn out from skipping rope, kicking soccer balls and running to and from school and around the neighborhood ... and, with the worn-out shoes in hand, he went off to his bedroom by himself.

Kneeling by his bed, he gave thanks to God for the worn-out shoes in his house. For his children could walk and run and skip rope and enjoy the normal life of children.

Again, counting our blessings ... and **Rejoicing in all the good God has given us.**

So often, in our lives, it's important to take pause, slow down and put things in perspective. It's important to remember ... to see the BIG PICTURE of our lives ... and—always—to **rejoice in all the good** that has come our way in life.

IV.

These are bizarre and strange times in the history of our nation, with so many changes and transitions all about us. In many ways, we are wandering spiritually as a nation ... not knowing where to turn ... what to believe in ... where to place our trust.

For example, despite the fact of our nation being the wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth, there has perhaps never been a time in recent decades when we have been so caught up in trying to sort out lives ... trying to make sense of things ... and trying to arrive at a point of reassurance about the future.

Anxiety and fear abound ... our souls are unsettled ... and while spiritual fixes proliferate, the signs of our confusion and frustration grow. This wandering begs for the balm of spiritual healing.

The starting point for healing is a profound, internal sense of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is itself rooted in grace—in the free gift of a loving God whose abundance—every day—pours over us.

Deuteronomy says—to the Israelites and to us: REMEMBER ... remember who you are, who God is and what God has done. And to symbolize your remembering, take some of *the first fruits* of what has come your way in life, present them to God and bow down in the God's presence.

In other words—every day—be grateful and humble because God is good and our blessings are many.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us in **Philippians**,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice ...and stop all the self-centered worrying but, rather, be thankful for what you have and talk with God about what's in your heart.

V.

You see, friends, thanksgiving is a condition of the spirit. It's a general disposition we feel about life. In many ways, it's an attitude. However, make no mistake: it's a choice we make—every day. Any of us can choose to be grateful. We can choose to embody a generous spirit, a spirit of gratitude and appreciation for the gift of life.

A minister tells about how, in one of the churches he served, a member of the congregation gave him a rose boutonniere for the lapel of his suit every Sunday. It was just something this person wanted to do. Although he was appreciative of the gesture, after a while it became sort of routine. Then one Sunday, it took on a whole new meaning.

As he was walking through the greeting line, following the service, a young boy asked the minister, *Sir, what are you going to do with your flower?*

At first, the minister didn't know what he was referring to but as the boy was pointing to the rose on his lapel, he asked the boy, *Oh, do you mean this?*

Yes sir, the boy replied, *if you're going to throw it away, I would love to have it.*

The preacher smiled, telling him he could have the flower. However, with his curiosity prompting him, he asked the boy if he wouldn't mind telling him what he was going to do with the flower?

The boy, who was probably around 9 or 10 years old, looked up at the preacher and said,

Sir, I'm going to give it to my granny.

- My mother and father divorced last year.
- *I was living with my mother, but she married again and wanted me to live with my father.*
- I lived with him for a while, but he said I couldn't stay, so he sent me to live with my grandmother.
- *She is so good to me. She cooks for me and takes care of me ...and I just wanted to give her something for loving me like she does.*

When the boy finished, the minister was so touched by his poignant story that he could hardly speak. As he began to unpin the rose from his lapel, he stopped suddenly and, looking toward the front of sanctuary, he said,

Son, that's such a beautiful story ... but this flower isn't enough. If you'll look in front of the pulpit up there, you'll see a bouquet of flowers. Different families buy them for the church each week. I want you to take those flowers to your granny because she deserves the very best.

And then the boy made one last statement that captured the power of the moment:

What a wonderful day, he said, *I asked for one flower but got a whole, beautiful bouquet.*

VI.

Now that's not only a thankful spirit, it's a thankful attitude. It's that sort of attitude that can make a difference in our lives every day.

Rejoicing in all the good news God has given us.

Wherever you are in your life journey, friends, give thanks.

However you think you are doing in your life—whether you're doing better or worse, whatever it is, give thanks.

Whatever your relative abundance or poverty, give thanks.

Whatever is going on with those whom you love most in life and those who love you most, give thanks.

Whatever your fortune or misfortune, give thanks.

Whatever the hopes and dreams in your spirit or the lamentations and regrets in your heart, give thanks.

Whatever the belief or unbelief in your faith, give thanks.

For our thanksgiving is our human response to God's infinite Providence and love ... and to God's saving grace.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com