

THANKSGIVING – November 26 & 27, 2008
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD – Deuteronomy 8:17-20

Many of us have short memories. We are quick to forget what good things have happened to us and who has done them for us and we are quick to complain and focus on the bad. Today as we celebrate our national day of Thanksgiving, we may be wondering why we should be giving thanks. As we read and listen about the state of the economy not just in our nation but throughout the world, things do not appear to be very promising. As people's investments in the stock market continue to plummet in value, as the value of our homes decline, as people's jobs become more uncertain and the unemployment rate in our nation continues to rise, why should we be giving thanks? It is just in such situations that we need to stop, ponder and consider what the Lord has done. It is a time for us as followers of Jesus Christ to remember what is really important. It is not the value of our retirement accounts. It is not the value of our homes and the certainty of our jobs. It is not the things that we have acquired that may bring us enjoyment and happiness in this life.

When things are going well it is very easy to forget the Lord and assume that we have been able to do all these things and it is because of our hard work, our intelligence and wisdom that we have been able to amass great wealth and seeming security. Today Moses reminds the Children of Israel and us, the followers of Jesus Christ in 2008, that we need to **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD. I) Remember His Goodness** and also to **II) Remember His Warnings**.

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of three farewell addresses that Moses delivers to the people of God. God's people have been wandering for almost 40 years in the wilderness since God had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. During this time everyone who was twenty years old and older at Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses and the Children of Israel the Ten Commandments on those two tablets of stone has died. Soon God will lead his people across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Moses will die just before this event takes place. Moses now takes time to review for God's people the past and reminds them of all the things that the Lord, their God, has done for them. He stresses this fact – Remember the Lord your God.

REMEMBER THE LORD'S GOODNESS

We often remember the bad but we are quick to forget the good. Have you ever noticed that most of the news reports we hear are about the accidents, the crimes, the murders that are committed, the natural disasters and catastrophes? You don't hear much about the good things that are happening. Why not? Good news doesn't sell newspapers, it doesn't generate interest and attention like bad news does.

Another interesting fact about good things that happen is that we often take credit for them and believe it is because of our hard work and ingenuity that we have been able to do these things. We don't give credit to the one who has given us the talents and abilities to do what we do.

As Moses begins this section of his farewell address he points out to the Israelites and to us that we are prone to take credit for the good things that happen in our lives. He 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 confirm his covenant which he swore to your forefathers as it is today." (Vv. 17-18) What covenant or promise did God make with the forefathers of the Children of Israel, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? He promised to make them a great people. He promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. He promised that from them would come one who would rescue the entire human race and make peace between God and man.

When Moses says, “Remember the Lord your God”, one of the things that these people were to remember is how God had rescued them and delivered them from the terrible slavery and subjection they had under the Egyptians. The people had no freedom they were forced to work for the Egyptians and carry out their great building projects. They were slave laborers. But God who never forgets or breaks a promise sent Moses to deliver his people and lead them out of the land of bondage, sorrow and hopelessness. God miraculously rescued his people as he parted the Red Sea and allowed over two million people to walk on the dry ground of the sea bed and then proceeded to allow those waters to drown the king of Egypt and his mighty army as they attempted to catch the Israelites and bring them back to Egypt. Moses stresses “Remember the Lord your God.”

In these times it is good for us to hear those words and remember the Lord our God. It is this same Lord who has remembered his promises to us. He has kept the promise to rescue us. Our financial future may be very uncertain and shaky, but our eternal future is not in question. Just as God sent Moses to lead his people out of slavery into the Promised Land, so God has sent his only Son Jesus Christ to rescue us from slavery, hopelessness and despair. Our life does not consist in the abundance of the things of this world. Our life is centered in our relationship with Jesus Christ and the eternal future we have with him. All the things of this world can be taken from us, but the one thing needful and the most important no one can take. That one thing is the eternal home that Jesus Christ has prepared for each of us by his holy life and his innocent death and sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. We have forgiveness for all of our sins. We have the promise of an eternal home in glory that will not decrease in value nor will we ever experience foreclosure on that home. We will never have to move from that home either. It is ours forever. Because Jesus Christ won it for us, paid the price for us to have it and freely gives it to us with no strings attached.

In addition to giving us what we need for our eternal future, our Lord does give us the ability to produce wealth, to provide for ourselves and to help those in need. The talents and abilities that each of us has have been given to us by our loving Lord and Savior. As he blesses our work we with his help are able to produce wealth and enjoy the benefits of our work.

In times like these it is so easy to focus on all the negatives and to forget what the Lord has done and continues to do for each of us on a daily basis. This is reason to give thanks to the Lord our God.

REMEMBER THE LORD’S WARNING

As Moses concludes this portion of his farewell address he also tells us to remember the Lord’s warning. “If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow after other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.” (Vv. 19-20)

Our short memories not only forget God’s blessings but we also forget the past and the poor choices and decisions that we and others have made and the consequences that followed. When we don’t remember from history we are often doomed to repeat it. Those of us who have lived for a longer period of time often see the same things repeat over and over again. We often don’t take to heart the Lord’s warnings nor learn from our own mistakes and disobedience and that of others.

Here Moses tells the Children of Israel “Remember the nations that the Lord helped us conquer destroy. They had put their trust in false gods and those gods were not able to help them. If you now turn away from the Lord your God and disobey his commands and don’t listen to his Word, you can expect the same thing to happen to you. The Lord will not bless you but punish and destroy you.”

On this Thanksgiving Day it is good for us to remember that warning not to turn away from the Lord our God and follow after other gods. That can only lead to sorrow, hopeless and punishment. We are seeing that happen before our eyes today. Many who had put their confidence in wealth and what it supposedly could bring them

in this life are seeing that god evaporate before their eyes. Many who have followed the gods of greed and covetousness are being severely disappointed and left without hope or a future.

People of God, put your trust in the Lord your God. He is the God who made you. He is the God who sent his only Son to live and die for you. This is the God who adopted you as his child in Holy Baptism and given you the gift of faith and trust in him. This is the Lord your God who has given you the ability to provide wealth for yourself to take care of yourself and to help others in need. This is the Lord our God who is faithful and keeps all of his promises to us. For this we bow in humble adoration and give our thanks and praise to the true and only God, the God of our salvation.

Amen