

Thanksgiving Eve
November 23, 2011
Deuteronomy 8:7-18

“Take Care”

It's Thanksgiving – that great American holiday which calls us to pause and reflect upon the many good things that God has richly and abundantly poured out upon us. The Taylor family, in particular, always looked forward to Thanksgiving because they could trace their family heritage back to that very first Thanksgiving in 1621 at Plymouth, Massachusetts. They were very proud that their ancestors came over on the Mayflower, and boasted many influential people in their family tree: members of Congress, successful businessmen, sports stars and celebrities. However, as in every family, there's always one member of the family that you'd just as soon forget about. For the Taylors, that was great uncle Jefferson Taylor, who was executed in the electric chair. A special genealogist was hired to write the family history in such a way as to put the best construction on this unfortunate part of their family history. Here's what she wrote: “Great Uncle Jefferson occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest of ties, and his death came as a great shock.” Besides turkey and all the trimmings, Thanksgiving is also about family – the good, the bad, and the ugly. As our Thanksgiving feasting and celebrations come to a close and we bid one another goodbye, many of us will say to our family and friends: “Take care.” We hear those very words in the Old Testament lesson appointed for Thanksgiving: **“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God...”** (Deuteronomy 8:11). Those two words “Take Care” are the theme of the message on this Thanksgiving Eve. May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

The book of Deuteronomy is really a review of all that God had already told his people: that they are the Lord's treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18), as well as how they are to live in response to all that God had done for them when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He had led them through the wilderness for forty years and provided for their needs: manna from heaven, water from the rock, quail for meat (Exodus 16:1-36; 17:1-7; Numbers 11:1-35). Now, as they prepare to enter into the Promised Land, Moses went over everything a second time. In fact, that is what Deuteronomy literally means: “the second law.” Repetition, as we all know, is pretty important if we want something to really sink in and take hold. In fact, we usually have to say it over and over again. Why? Because we are prone to forget.

Moses paints a beautiful picture of that Promised Land that God's people will enter into; in fact, many see parallels between this and the bounty of our own land here. We are especially mindful of this beauty and bounty at Thanksgiving. But with this bounty also comes a cautious reminder: **“Take care,”** Moses tells the people. And by telling them to “take care,” he means something totally different than what we mean when we say this. Moses is telling the people to be mindful and attentive, wary and watchful, so that when their bellies are full and their material possessions are multiplied they do not forget God: **“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God... lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God...”** (Deuteronomy 8:11-14a). That is always a danger for the child of God; it was in the time of

Moses, and it is for us today. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, put it very succinctly: “Luxury is more ruthless than war.” Even in the challenging economic times in which we live, when the Washington, D.C., area is feeling the pinch like the rest of the country, let us take care that we do not forget the Lord our God – not only at Thanksgiving, but throughout the entire year.

Thanksgiving provides us with a much-needed opportunity to reflect, recognize, and remember the Source behind the blessings in our lives. Like that whole line of products puts it: “Life is good!” And it is good because God our Maker and Redeemer is good. If we forget this, then nothing else much matters. I want to read a quote to you in this regard by a famous person: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!” Who said this? President Abraham Lincoln said this in 1863 when proclaiming a national fast day in the midst of the Civil War. If Lincoln believed this was true in 1863, what would he think today?

Despite our forgetting about the Lord God, the saving good news for us is that the Lord God does not forget about us. Jesus’ healing of the ten lepers in the Gospel lesson (Luke 17:11-19) points us to the greater truth here – that our salvation is not dependent on what we can do for God, but on what God in Christ has already done for us. The mercy of the Lord that brought healing to those lepers points to an even greater healing: the healing of forgiveness, life, and salvation that we have through Jesus’ death upon the cross. With Paul, we can only say: “**Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!**” (2 Corinthians 9:15). And that’s probably the best way to close out this sermon for Thanksgiving: remembering all that God has done for us, rejoicing in the gift of Jesus, resolving to serve our neighbor with Christ-like love, we say with our lips and with our lives: “**Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!**” A blessed Thanksgiving to you. Amen.