

Thanksgiving 2022
Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Matthew 6:25-33

A few years ago, a friend of mine “woke up” in an Emergency Room in Denver and couldn’t remember how she had gotten there. Her husband was in the room--she recognized him--and she knew who she was, but she couldn’t remember anything else.

Ironically, the weekend she was here was chock full of nothing but memories. She had come back for a milestone anniversary of the company she had worked for, and she was being honored at the gathering for her years of service and the many successes she had helped them achieve. It was a terrific celebration and she talked and reminisced with so many friends and coworkers. Several hours later she remembered none of it.

All the scans and tests at the hospital came back normal, and the doctors finally decided that she had what is called Transient Global Amnesia. It’s temporary and usually harmless--no one really knows why it happens to some people. All the same, can you imagine how disorienting it must be to not be able to remember, even for just a day?

Tomorrow, and really, the next month, will be full of remembering for most of us. If you are with friends or family, stories will be told of previous Thanksgivings--turkey successes and failures; reunions; and the antics at the ‘kid’s table.’ If you are alone or if family is scattered for you, you’ll likely revisit memories of those years when the kitchen was crowded. Memories help shape our lives, help give us a narrative of our life’s story.

Remembering is a theme woven through our scripture readings for tonight. “When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall take some of the first fruit of the ground and set it before the Lord...” It had been a generation-long journey for the people of Israel, from their enslavement in Egypt to the wilderness wanderings, and finally to a place of freedom and rest. It was, and is, a complicated history of blessing and belligerence, so these verses

command remembering.--Remembering that God's mighty hand had given everything they were enjoying, because it would be all too easy to have a kind of amnesia--To forget the whole story of God's action; to forget to say thank you.

So Deuteronomy gives the instruction--when you settle in the land, bring an offering to God. Tell the story of how God brought you this far. Say thank you, and invite everyone to celebrate with you. Remember.

It happens, doesn't it? We don't necessarily mean to do it, but we forget, too. It's just so easy to use those words "me" and "mine," to look around and give ourselves a pat on the back for all that we've accomplished and maybe accumulated. It's so easy to forget that everything--everything--is a gift from God: the beautiful world around us, friends, family, the paycheck, the food, a place to live, and on and on. All of it pure gift from God--and we are blessed to steward the gifts, to live this gift of life for a time. What would you add to that list tonight? I imagine we would each have some specifics for ourselves and our life situation, but we would also find that we share thankfulness for so many things in common as children of God.

That sharing and commonality of this life might well be on our minds this week. The divisiveness that we all live with and the hateful speech that we've heard this year was acted out in a horrific way at Club Q in Colorado Springs. As a church that welcomes everyone, no exceptions, our hearts should break at violence and death directed at anyone because they are labeled somehow "less than" others.

When we begin to use those words "I, me, mine," we begin to see others not as companions in this life but competitors. We need to get what's ours and hang onto it, whether that's respect or status or possessions--and the easiest way to do that is to categorize people as "different" in whatever way we choose--sexual orientation, politics, race, economic status--not the same as me...and then one more step: not as good, not as worthy as me. We forget the blessing of actually living out Jesus' command to "love one another as I have loved you." We forget the beauty and wonder that God creates in each of us and in the world around us.

Jesus invites us to remember in the Gospel tonight--look around you, Jesus says. Do you see how God provides for everything in this world, how God provides for you? God will never stop caring for you, never stop loving you and everyone in this world. That love will be enacted profoundly in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

It is an invitation to freedom, really: to trust that God's gifts will always be enough; to trust that we all have value in Christ. We can stop grasping and categorizing and forgetting; and instead remember all that God has done, all that God has given. So tell the story of how God has brought you this far. Say thank you, and invite others to share what you've been given. Remember.