

Lent 1 Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Romans 10:8b-13 Luke 4:1-13 February 14, 2016
St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland. Nigel Taber-Hamilton

And so the journey begins again!

Today it begins with Deuteronomy, which claims to record those things Moses proclaimed to the Israelites on the last day of his life. I can only say, as an aside, that he must have been an amazingly strong person to be able to pour out so much just before he died!

Today's passage – toward the end of that book – is part of a series of instructions on how to celebrate a harvest festival – a “Thanksgiving” if you will.

As part of these instructions, Moses wants the Israelites to remember their origins. And so he reminds Israelites – and, now, us – that we are all the ancestors of a “wandering Aramean” – a nomad, a landless, homeless person.

That seems to me to be true on multiple levels. This continent was devoid of human life until about 30,000 years ago, when settlers from what is now Siberia came across a land-bridge to Alaska and so spread across north America – hence the moniker “First Nations.” This land wasn't “my land,” it wasn't “your land.” It belonged to no human.

So that makes us all immigrants, or their descendants.

God reminds the Israelites in today's reading, that they had no place that belonged to them; they were nomads, with no fixed place to lay their heads. Worse, they descended into slavery, suffered “hard labor....affliction.....toil.....oppression.” They didn't even belong to themselves.

And God freed them, God saved them – in every possible way that a person, a community, can be freed, can be saved. The metaphor – as is always the case – is even more powerful than the story itself: freedom from that which ails us: freedom from every sense of oppression, whether of the spirit, or of the body, or the mind; freedom from the control of others; freedom from every sense of toil; freedom to be fully, completely human.

“It's all a gift,” Deuteronomy says, “everything. Even this land – this wasn't “your land – it was God's – God's to give, without merit, without justification – free.” Even yourselves, even what it means to be human – free.

And yet we haven't learned that lesson. We allow ourselves to be oppressed, we take for granted the things around us – even the people around us – that we think we ‘own.’”

Paul knew that – “everyone who calls on the name of the lord shall be saved” he reminded the Romans. Not “might be” – no “maybe's” with God. No, “SHALL”

Back to Deuteronomy! And so, Moses says, given that it's all a gift, we should give thanks! And

we give thanks, Moses says, by giving back.

So we get instructions on how to hold a liturgy – the Liturgy of the First Fruits.

Our lesson from Deuteronomy, then, in its full context, offers us an instructive picture as we aspire to be the faithful people of God.

First: we're instructed to recall that our redemption is rooted in God's faithfulness to his word acting on behalf of the homeless (wandering Aramean), the oppressed (afflicted resident aliens), and the marginalized (orphans and widows).

Second: we're urged to celebrate not simply the bounty of the land, but the faithfulness of God which is the source of the bounty. Our island home Earth sustains us with its produce because God is faithful to maintain the fruitfulness of the land.

Third: we're instructed to position ourselves as channels of God's blessing to the vulnerable and the marginalized through our obedience to his desire that we consistently share it with them.

We confess that God has acted on behalf of the powerless and blesses them with abundance. But God acts toward a further purpose: that we, the redeemed might, ourselves act on behalf of the powerless in the same way that God has acted, blessing them with abundance. In short, God continues to redeem the powerless, but through the agency of the people of God – us – when we choose to be faithful.

And, lastly, our thanksgiving for being part of the Chosen People – part of this community – calls forth some form of concrete action in support of this community – for it is, after all, not our community, it's God's, that we are privileged to be a part of. How that thankfulness is expressed is fundamentally a part of our stewardship of God's earth, of the abundance of this earth, and of our stewardship of each other.

So it is that we are given our marching orders, as we journey on into this season of preparation for the new life in Christ promised to us.