

6 March 2022 St Brandon's

SERMON: Giving and Remembering

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4: 1-13

Please be seated

Which of the many heart-breaking human stories of this week has struck you most?

The Ukrainian grandmother recalling events of world war two, being repeated in the same places, in her lifetime?

The man clambering through the wreckage of his whole street to show reporters the spot where his daughter died?

The young children living in the Kiyv metro, their parents unclear about how they will ever emerge?

The Syrian refugee collecting donations for an aid convoy to Eastern Europe?

The crowds of German families at Berlin's main station waiting to take Ukrainian arrivals into their homes?

In the darkness of war, the light of God's love shines even more starkly. For *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Against this backdrop, for which we will pray in our intercessions, on this first Sunday of Lent I invite you to renew your commitment: to pray, to give and to listen to God, the Most High God, who is our refuge and stronghold.

Before we turn to today's Old Testament reading, a prayer:

**Gracious God, please speak your word to us today,
that our lives may more closely reflect your truth
and be more aligned to your priorities.**

**May your Spirit soften our hearts and open our ears. We ask this in the
name of Jesus. Amen**

Deuteronomy 26 shows us Moses preparing God's people for how to live when they finally reach the Promised Land. It reveals two crucial and connected principles as they settle in, which are practices to adopt and habits to embed. After forty years in the wilderness, Moses knows that this settled life, in their own land, will be very different. They, like we, have short memories and need clear guidance to live well.

Here are the two principles: **giving first** and **remembering with thanks**. Two actions- giving and remembering, and two distinct ways to do them.

Giving **first** and remembering **with thanks**

Giving first is sometimes known as 'first fruits' from this passage. God's people give back to God some of the first fruits of their crops, each harvest. This is formalised as part of worship – taking a basket to the priest in the temple. A simple, powerful action; a recognition that all they have is given by God, like saying grace before meals, so easy to skip but so important to do. In the wilderness they had no fields to plough, no seeds to sow, no crops to harvest, but now they do, and all of it is given by God, as was promised. This first fruits principle was laid down for the whole community, to support everyone in carrying it out – something we can learn from in our society where 'personal choice' is so highly prized, not always with good results.

The current famine in Africa, climate emergencies across the globe, war in Europe, must surely awake us to the fragility and insecurity of our lives. As it was for the children of Israel, so it remains for us: all we have is given by God, not a right or a foregone conclusion, but a gift. When we give, we do so in response in to the love of God which never lets us go, whatever the depths of human sin.

We give in response to God's goodness which is unfailing; as Geoff reminded us a few weeks ago:

God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.

By **giving first** we declare all this.

By giving first we choose to be generous, not greedy,
to live in trust not in fear, to meet the needs of others before our own, to take responsibility for one another,
to live as people made in the image of our Creator.

In the notices today our Treasurer Mike will update us on giving to St Brandon's, but I also want to thank all of you who give first to God in this way, through planned financial giving, the bedrock of this church and our ministry here.

Thank you if you are able to give large amounts, which not only help pay increased heating bills and maintain this beautiful church, but also enable us to help support

the church's work across Durham diocese. Thank you if you give little and often: you help the PCC to plan and use our money wisely. And whilst I never want to discourage 'one off' gifts, it is the *regular planned* giving of our church members which has kept us afloat through the last two years of pandemic and will continue to do so in the future. Thank you. all of you who **give first** in this way.

The second principle we find in this passage is that of **remembering, with thanks**. The children of Israel

remembered where they'd come from, that their ancestor Abraham was a wandering Aramean, then they became slaves and now they were free, with a land of their own, not because they deserved it, but because God rescued them and blessed them. But this isn't just a private internal matter.

No, as they hand their basket to the priest, each person lays hold of God's promises for themselves, saying

Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.

Similarly, as the gift is accepted, each person responds and reaffirms their dependence on God and all that God has done for them, concluding,

So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.

The giving and the remembering go hand in hand, rooted in and flowing from the relationship of God with his people.

And they lead to worship, and celebration.

You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

This isn't dour, grudging duty, but a party! As the first fruits are given away, so the rest is to be enjoyed and shared with the whole community, in all its diversity.

Giving first makes giving joyful and **remembering with thanks** is a cause for celebration.

In conclusion, both **giving** and **remembering** are key for us, if we are to have our hearts and minds set on God's priorities. We have choices, as Jesus did in the wilderness.

at the start of his public ministry.

For Jesus, all three choices posed by Satan, tempted him to *not* put God first. He overcame them by **giving God priority** in worship and service, and by **remembering and proclaiming**, through Scripture, the truth about God and himself. And all the scriptures with which Jesus answered the Devil's challenges came from the book of Deuteronomy.

Thus, as Jesus embarks on the new Exodus for God's people, rescuing us from slavery to sin and bringing us to the promised land of his Kingdom, Jesus gives first to his Father God and remembers, with thanks.

A moment of quiet Then I'll lead us in a similar prayer to the one we used at the start:

Gracious God, please continue to speak your word to us this week, that our lives may more closely reflect your truth and be more aligned to your priorities.

May your Spirit daily soften our hearts and open our ears. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

