

Remember!

⁵ Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. ⁷ Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me.” Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.

A classmate told me of a strange practice he saw in a church. After they received communion, they would step down from the rail, turn to the right and bow to the wall before returning to their seats. I have never seen that, nor did my classmate, and no one knew why. One day they found out why. That church was being renovated. While removing several coats of paint off that wall, they found a picture of the Lord's Supper that they must have painted on that wall when the church was built. Now it makes sense. They use to bow in reverence to Christ after Communion. But decades later, after several coats of paint, they kept bowing and no one knew why.

Today we go into the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is a series of sermons Moses preached to the Israelites. The forty years of wandering in the desert is over. They are ready to enter the promised land. The Holy Spirit used Moses to prepare the people for it. In today's text, Moses tells them what to do after they harvested their first crop in the promised land. They were to bring in a special offering to the Lord. So they understand why they were bringing this offering, he wrote down what they should say as they lay that offering on the altar.

We need to remember why we do things here at church. We sing hymns, we follow a written liturgy, we present our offerings, readings and sermons are given, and so on. Even outside of church we need to understand why. Why should we love our neighbors? Why teach our kids about God and Christ? The key to all of this is to remember. I pray the Holy Spirit works on hearts to help us to remember our past, our rescue, and finally where we are today.

I. Remember where you came from.

The first thing Moses wrote down in this offering liturgy was a reminder of their past. **⁵ Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor.**

The father mentioned here is Jacob. Jacob is called Aramean because he spent twenty years working for Uncle Laban in Aram. He fled to his uncle Laban's literally with nothing after his brother swore to kill him. While he worked there, he was like an indentured servant. He signed long term contracts and often got cheated by Uncle Laban. He is called wandering because he never really a place to call home. He lived in Aram a while. Even when he returned home, he moved constantly. He eventually had to flee to Egypt because of famine. He was a wandering man.

And Jacob and his family did not deserve to be called God's people. Jacob would be an embarrassment to any family. He lied. He cheated family members. He had multiple wives and raised a dysfunctional home. Yet, the Lord blessed Jacob beyond compare. Jacob and his family fled to Egypt with only seventy males. By the time of the Exodus from Egypt, they had numbered over 603,000 males not including women and children. That is an increase of over 861,000%. That is amazing especially when you remembered how the Egyptians treated them. They enslaved them. They endured hard labor. And when their numbers kept growing, the Egyptians killed all the firstborn male babies. Despite all of that, God made them into a great nation from very humble beginnings.

What is your past? Sure, we can talk about how your parents, grandparents, or great-great-grandparents had next to nothing. You may not have much more, but then again, you probably have more than they ever dreamed of. Sibley county is not a rich county, but look at the land. I don't know if you can say there ever was a crop failure. We are doing well.

But look at your other past. Who are we that we should call God, “Our Father,” and he should call us, “My children?” We don't deserve it. In fact, we deserve the opposite. Like Jacob, every day we give God every reason to give up on us. He saves us from the guilt of sin, and every day we commit more. We will do well if we adopted the same attitude as a Roman centurion who said to Jesus, “**Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.**” We are unworthy. In fact, God should pay us back with judgment, death and punishment for the sins we commit.

Gold and silver are precious metals because we say they are. As metals, they are very poor. Gold and silver are not as good or strong as steel or iron. Yet they are precious because we have attached a value to them. Like gold, there is nothing precious about

us. Yet, we are worth something because of the price that God put on us. And that leads us into the second part of this offering liturgy. Let's remember how the Lord rescues us.

II. Remember how the Lord rescues you.

⁷ Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. What would be the greatest event in U.S. history? You might say the Declaration of Independence which made us our own country. You can equally argue the battle of Yorktown where the British realized they could not win, or Midway, the turning point in the war in the Pacific. The greatest event in the lives of the Israelites was their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Through Moses his mighty arm struck them blow after blow with plague after plague until the Egyptians begged the Israelites to go.

What is the greatest event in your life? Your marriage? The birth of your kids? Your land, your job? How about your deliverance from another kind of slavery, slavery to the guilt of your sins, to death, and to the devil?

In our gospel reading we have Jesus battling the devil. The devil came with both barrels blazing but Jesus defeated him. But that was just one of many battles. It all came down to a battle fought on a small hill called Golgotha. There Jesus gave the devil the death blow. It says in Hebrews, **Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.** Notice how the Bible often calls death a sleep or slumber. It can because death has become that to us. Jesus died. That death takes away your sin. His death takes away our death. The death we experience is a sleep from which we will awaken, not to eternal punishment, but to salvation.

That is the greatest thing that has happened in your life. Like gold or silver, we are valuable because of the price God was willing to pay for us. That price is not measured in gold or silver, but with the holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death of his Son. So, remember how God delivers you.

III. Remember with your worship and offerings.

The fact God tells us to remember is proof that we have a tendency to forget. To be honest, I have trouble remembering my sermon theme from last Sunday. Now don't ask me about a sermon from the fall of 2018. We tend to forget. We also forget as we take credit for this or that, forgetting that these are blessings from God. Like Jesus, we are in the wilderness of a sinful world and the devil is tempting us with more than three temptations. Those temptations appeal to our sinful natures which proudly ignore God. How long did it take the Israelites the melt down gold and pound it into a statue and gave it, not God, credit for delivering them from Egyptians? We are talking weeks.

That is why Moses wrote a special liturgy for the people. After the first harvest, they were to bring in their offering and say those words, reminding them of who they were, how God saves them, how he blesses them with this land and harvest. We have those reminders here in church. Soon we will receive some bread and wine. But remember what Jesus said. His body and blood is actually there, too, and we take it "in remembrance of him." The Baptism font I hope isn't merely in the way. I hope you see it and remember that you are baptized into Christ. This is why we open the Bible and read it and then have a sermon on it, to remind us. We also use hymns carefully chosen, not because of their melodies, but their words.

But there is one more way we can remember. With our offerings. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. Before they could take the crop to market, they were to take the firstfruits, the first and best from their crops, and give it back to the Lord. They could grudgingly give it as if it were a form of taxation, or they could speak the words Moses gave them in our text today remembering they would not have a crop in a land they would not own without the Lord's blessing. It was to be a true thank offering.

If you brought a chocolate cake over to the house this afternoon, I like to think I would invite you in and say, "Let me give a piece." That explains our offerings. The Lord gives and we gladly offer him a piece back. It is a way of showing how worthy God is and how much we appreciate him. It is a way to remember him and all he does.

Like those who bowed before the wall without knowing why, we could simply go through the motions. Or we could remember why we do such things. Remember. Remember who you were. Remember how God delivered you. Remember with your worship and offerings. Amen.