

Sermon Notes: November 24, 2019 **Focus:** Thanksgiving and Deuteronomy 26

Lectionary Readings: https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/HolyDays/Thanks_C_RCL.html

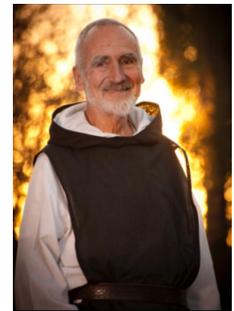
Today I'd like to share a potpourri of thoughts with you. Do you like my autumnal themed pun? I offer you a meditation on two people who embody a thankful spirit. I'll give you a Thanksgiving table exercise as well as a practical way to understand empathy. Finally, I'll devote page 2 to a deeper look at Deuteronomy 26.



Two thankful people

First, **Corrie ten Boom** — She and her sister were in a Nazi concentration camp. Amidst the sewage and bruises and filth, there were fleas. Her sister gave thanks to God for everything, even the fleas! This turned out to be oddly reasonable. Abusive by habit, the guards avoided these particular flea infested prisoners.

Second, Scripture says, *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7).* **David Stendhal Rast** is a master of thankfulness. If you want a great meditation on thankfulness check out this TED talk <https://youtu.be/UtBsl3j0YRQ>



Exercise Table Talk - you might roll your eyes, and that's fine, but I offer you a small exercise for your Thanksgiving table. Each person can share just one of these and they can pick which one to share.

Questions:

- What are you grateful for?
- What are you proudest of?
- What's been the happiest moment of your life so far?
- What's been the hardest moment of your life, and how did you get through it?
- Who has been kindest to you?
- If your great great grandchildren could listen to this years from now: is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?
- If you could honor one person in your life — living or dead — by listening to their story, who would that be, what would you ask them and why?
- From — <https://ideas.ted.com/10-questions-to-ask-your-family-around-the-table/>

Bonus - Brene Brown's way of empathy video that informs the sermon is: <https://youtu.be/1Ewvqu369Jw>. Her frame for how to be empathetic is: 1 Take perspective 2 Stay out of judgment 3 Recognize emotion 4 Communicate that emotion.

Bonus, Bonus - Story Core episode "Good man" -- an Incredible story about true family

<https://storycorps.org/animation/a-good-man/>



Deuteronomy 26– *I write this section inspired heavily by an article written by Esther M. Menn, the Dean and Vice - President for Academic Affairs at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, IL.*

This chapter of our reading focuses on first fruits. After 40 years of aimless wandering, Moses teaches the people about the right way to live as well as the priority of giving God thanks first. Mose does so by reminding them of festivals with which they were already familiar.

One of these, the festival of weeks, is fifty days after Passover. A worshiper was called to bring their first fruits — the best of their harvest— to God. That’s why this reading is strongly associated with Thanksgiving day readings. 50 should also ring a bell in your mind as an important biblical number -- Pentecost (pente=50). Early Christians took this “Pentecost” festival and made it their own. It became a celebration of the Holy Spirit. They reimagined this festival as a first fruits of **G**od’s offering *to them* (not the other way around) after Jesus’ ascension. Because God gave a sort of first fruits to them, they were called to give the rest of their lives back in service to God.

Seven The first fruit offerings in Deuteronomy were made of seven native plants of the land: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. Excluding vegan Thanksgivings, we have an incredible amount of specificity in our own thanksgiving. As a kid, when I went to Henryetta, Oklahoma, where my stepfather was from, you must have the seven essential elements - broccoli cheese casserole, a turkey (of course), stuffing from said turkey, pumpkin pie, cranberries-whipped cream-pecan frozen “pie”, green beans cooked in cream of mushroom soup (my least favorite), and of course football.

I suspect your elements are different, but I imagine your family would have a strong reaction if you deviated from the pre-scripted Thanksgiving meal. Very few of us are deeply connected with the land now, but we can look at how our specifics can be a vehicle for giving thanks for everything.

Not just for your family Like Dr. Menn points out, “Even after the Israelites are settled in their own land, they are called to remember past journeys, when they were vulnerable itinerants or “aliens” (26:5) living in foreign lands. The reference to a “wandering Aramean” (26:5) recalls the Israelites’ ancestor Jacob, also known by the name Israel, who fled from his brother Esau’s enmity to live with relatives in Aram and who later emigrated with his family to Egypt to survive a famine.”

God has and is sustaining us through our own political, economic and emotional famines. It’s right and good for us to give our thanks back to God. It’s also right and good to remember those who are not family. My mother-in-law has a tradition of inviting people to her home who don’t have anywhere else to go. At first, I found it irritating, which is on its face ironic because long before I was married to Kimberly, I was one of those people.

Menn concludes, “The memory of being landless and vulnerable, preserved here as well as in the longer liturgical recitation in Deuteronomy 26:5-10, cultivates an ethic of empathy as the basis for including those currently landless and vulnerable. God’s inclusive generosity embraces us all.” Full article http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1607

Happy Thanksgiving, Todd