

November 21, 2010  
Deuteronomy 26:1-11

### A Land of Milk and Honey

In our passage from Deuteronomy this morning, the instruction that is given to the Israelites is this--- that they should make this declaration in front of God----it's something like a confession of faith. It's the briefest of testimonies to what God did for them, past, present, and future. This is what they have to be grateful to God for, this and much more----

They were to remember and repeat that they were descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had great faith and went wherever God told them to go.

They were to remember and repeat that God had rescued them from the oppression and slavery that they had suffered in Egypt, set them free by the plagues and the miracles that convinced Pharoah to let God's them go.

They were to remember and repeat that God had led them to their permanent home in a land flowing with milk and honey after forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

And after they recited these great blessings that God had given to them, they were to give offerings----offerings of the first fruits of their harvest. People who wander in the wilderness, people who live nomadic lives taking their herds of sheep and goats from pasture to pasture, people who are enslaved do not have their own land.

Finally, they had their own land, land where they could raise crops and harvest fruit and grain, and how could they help but be grateful to God for bringing them to this land? Land flowing with milk and honey, land rich enough to grow good food?

At this time of year we are reminded to be thankful for what God has given us. What would we remember and recite if we were to give testimony for all that God has given to us?

What would our list look like?

Tell me----

For all these things, we are grateful. But most of this list has to do with God's gifts to us as individuals.

I want to talk about what we should remember about what God has done for us as a congregation.

If we were to have a congregational testimony like the one the Israelites were told to recite, what would it be?

Maybe it would be something like---

In the days after World War II, people with vision worked hard to establish a church here in this place. Through the years, people came to worship and raise their children to know the Lord here. For the people who established this church and for those who helped it to grow, we say

Repeat after me---

THANKS BE TO GOD!

When the numbers of the faithful in this place dwindled, God brought more people to this place, people who had traveled from another country and were in need of a place to worship God as they had been taught to do. For these people who came from the Philippines to worship here, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Later on, God added another group of immigrants to this place where all are welcome, and again the fellowship grew! For the people from Vietnam who have come to join us, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

And in the year 2010, six members went home to God, and they now live in the place Jesus Christ prepared for them. They left here a rich legacy of faith and love and hope. For these saints who have gone on before us, we say---

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Babies have been born and children are growing in the knowledge and love of Christ. For all of these little ones, we say----

THANKS BE TO GOD!

People have travelled to Mississippi, called by God to serve other people. People have given food and blankets to the homeless here, and boxes of clothing were sent to others in need across the ocean. Other missions around the world have been supported by our prayers and our offerings. For all of these opportunities to serve and for all of the people here who have a heart for missions and service, we say----

THANKS BE TO GOD!

This house of God has been cared for and maintained. Worship is deep and true, the prayers pure, the music heartfelt and inspiring. Many people willingly give their time and effort to serve God in this place. For willing hearts and hands and voices, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Many people work quietly, behind the scenes, to print bulletins, work on budgets, pay bills, organize, repair, make phone calls, cook food, teach Sunday School. Without these people, the work of building the Kingdom of God, of growing disciples, of serving God by serving others, would not get done. For these quiet servants who do so much, we say---

THANKS BE TO GOD!

For the land where a place to worship and have fellowship together has been built, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

For the love of our church family, our brothers and sisters in Christ,  
we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

For the love and grace and forgiveness that God extends to us time  
after time, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

For the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who showed us how to  
live, how to forgive, how to serve one another, and how to have eternal  
life, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

For the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and among us, a presence  
which enables us to continue to grow in faith and brings us closer to being  
the people that God wants us to be, we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Wherever we are, we are in a land of milk and honey, because God is there with us. Every place is a place where we find all the good gifts that God has given us, all things beautiful and uplifting and inspiring. We are thankful for the ability to serve and love others, for the fellowship of one another, for food to eat and clothes to wear and homes to keep us safe and warm, for friends and family, for life itself! We say---

THANKS BE TO GOD!

And again we say

THANKS BE TO GOD!

And again

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Amen!