

# “Make Sure You Don’t Become So Full of Yourself and Your Things that You Forget GOD”

## Deuteronomy 8: 1-20

For the sermon today, I honestly thought about just reading this Scripture and then sitting right back down again. After all, it is sort of self-explanatory. What more could I really add? Moses spells it out pretty clearly in verse 14, when he says to the people of Israel, “Don’t become so full of yourself and your things that you forget your God.”

What better great and faith-filled message is there than that! It sounds certainly just right up our alley for Thanksgiving Sunday, right? In fact, we all might even be saying to ourselves, just like the people of Israel did to Moses, “We can take the hint, preacher. We get it. We need to remember our God, our God who has acted in the past to bless us.

This certainly seems to be an appropriate message for today. As we prepare to offer thanks for the overwhelming abundance of grace in our lives, as we gather to enjoy the goodness that fills our lives, let us remember that all things come from our God. Well, that’s where I was hoping to go for this sermon. But as I am coming to discover, sometimes where I want to go and where the Spirit leads are not exactly the same thing.

While I wanted to stay with the easy-peasy, feel good, idyllic section of verses 11-14, the Spirit of God kept bringing me back...okay forcing me back while kicking and screaming, the Spirit of God kept bringing me back to the verses that follow which state: “the God who delivered you from Egyptian slavery; the God who led you through that huge and fearsome wilderness, those desolate, arid badlands crawling with fiery snakes and scorpions; the God who gave you water gushing from hard rock; the God who gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never heard of, in order to give you a taste of the hard life, to test you so that you would be prepared to live well in the days ahead of you.”

The Spirit of God kept bringing me back to this last part, specifically the verse which says “in order to give you a taste of the hard life, to test you so that you will be prepared to live well in the days ahead of you.”

Now I’ll be the first to say that, this looks like theology gone bad. After all, it confirms very harmful statements about who people perceive God to be. It talks about God testing us. It talks about a God purposely giving us a taste of the hard life so that maybe we will appreciate what we have. This text seems to indicate that our God is fickle, treating God’s people as play things, keeping us around only for God’s amusement.

Even as I say these words, I am cringing. Because they go against everything I know and have experienced about our God, our God who time and time again has shown to me, shown to this community of faith, has shown to all of God's people that our God is loving and steadfast, that our God is merciful and gracious, that our God is faithful from generation to generation. This particular section in which the Spirit kept bringing me back to whether I wanted to or not, this particular section seemed to contradict everything we know and have experienced about our God.

That's when I realized that there was more going on in this text than meets the eye.

Here's why I say that: After spending time with this text, I have come to realize that the Spirit of God was inviting me, inviting us to look beyond the language used, so that we could see the process of transformation unfolding for the people of God. At this point in Israel's history, they were right there at the promise land. They could see it. They were frightened by the what ifs which lay before them. They were excited about being able to establish roots in a place which they could call their own. After 40 years of wandering, here they were, ready to begin a new adventure. Everything was falling into place. They were moving forward and Moses wanted to make sure that in moving forward, they moved forward with God as their center, with God as their guiding presence. Moses wanted them to make

sure that the people would always keep their hearts and minds open to God in their midst.

At this point, as they stand on the verge of a new beginning, Moses reminds the people that God has brought them this far and God will be moving forward with them now and always. He wants the people to understand that in this new beginning, there is a difference between living life and living well.

For people of faith, living well means staying grounded, staying connected, staying centered in the presence of God. For people of faith, living well means always, always having open hearts, and open minds to God's presence in their midst.

Moses knew that living well is being grounded in thankfulness for all that God done. And that this thankfulness reflects a certain behavior, reflects a certain attitude, this thankfulness for all God has done, reflects a certain way of being in relationship with God and with all of God's people. It is thankful people who experience the healing and wholeness of the Kingdom of God and want this experience for all of God's people as well.

Which makes this whole idea of God testing the people even more troublesome. Now while others would gleefully use the word "test" to explain God's actions in this moment, I would argue that this word when applied to God's actions has caused more pain than it ever helped in bringing people to God...all

because it reinforces the idea, that if something good is happening in our lives, than God must be blessing us and if not, if things are going horribly, horribly wrong for us, then God must be testing us.

But as I have said before, that is not how our God works.

So instead of testing the people being the starting place for understanding this text, I realized that the Spirit of God in all of God's grace was pushing me, pushing us to adjust our attitude by inviting us to rethink the story. To see instead of God testing the people, to see instead God still at work among the people of God, just as God has been since the beginning of time. God was there in the midst of the people at work transforming, refining, removing all the stuff that prevented them, that prevents us from becoming the people God created and calls us to be.

In reality, instead of testing the people in this moment as the people are getting ready to cross into the promise land, God was inviting them, inviting us to envision what can be possible when we keep God as our center of being and to adjust our attitudes and behaviors accordingly.

Or let me say it this way. This is the interactive part of the sermon. Usually around Thanksgiving, we ask ourselves and maybe ask other people, "What are you thankful for? And we get answers like we are thankful for food, for a roof over our head, for our health, etc. etc. Now don't get me wrong. These are all great things to be thankful for as people of faith. But I wonder if in pondering our list of

what we are thankful for, if we are thinking too small, if we are only thinking about the immediate reality. Being thankful reflects an attitude and behavior in response to knowing that God is still at work in this world. It helps us envision the possibilities of hope, the possibilities of new life, it helps us envision the possibilities of God's Kingdom coming to fruition here and now, possibilities which surround us each and every day.

So this year, I want us to do something a little different. What I am inviting us all to do is to have an attitude adjustment. I want us to rethink how we tell our stories of transformation, to look beyond the language that is often used to describe this process, you know the process where we get so overwhelmed by the darkness in the world, that we forget the light of Christ still burning bright in our midst. As people of faith, being thankful for what God has done and continues to do opens our hearts and our minds. It allows us to see the bigger picture, to see the process in which God is working to refine us, to reshape us into becoming the people of Welcome and Love God is calling us to be.

Because you see, the thing Moses realized as he was sharing the words with the people is that it was never about them as individuals. It was always about them as a community, envisioning what was possible, not only for themselves, but for all of God's people. Moses, through his call to the people to not forget their God, Moses was reframing their story, reminding them that their history was only part of

the story. It was and is about their story of hope, their story of grace, their story of love which they were living now, the same story that we as people of faith are living out still today.

So here's what I want us to do. I want us to turn our bulletins over to the back where our vision statement is located. I want us to spend a few moments reflecting on this statement and what possibilities it envisions for us as people of faith. Then, this is the interactive part of the sermon, then I want us to share a recent moment when you saw Midway Christian Church living out this vision as a community of faith.

We do this at the beginning of every board meeting and it really sets the tone. It helps break us out of the hardship mentality and opens our eyes to where God is at work in our midst. It helps adjust our attitudes from dismay to attitudes of hope and thankfulness for all that God is doing here and now.

Take a few moments....

Thanks to all who shared. It is my hope that in hearing these stories, we realize that there is so much more to our story as people of faith. All because we know...that it is not happy people who are thankful. Rather instead it is thankful people who are happy and live well in the days ahead of us. Amen.