

Sermon for Nov 8, 2020, “Three reasons for gratitude”, Deuteronomy 33:1-5

Introduction: The essentials of gratitude in the Bible

In 2020, we started with hope. However, the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in February, has completely changed our lives. In a little while, it is Thanksgiving and then Advent season begins. According to the church calendar, the New Year begins with Advent.

I would like to take some time to organize this year that we've been busy running for our life. Let's reflect on it so that no regrets remain next time. And let us enrich our gratitude through sharing with our neighbors.

Perhaps 2020 will be remembered as a year that has caused many difficulties. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in financial difficulties, unemployment and health problems. At the end of this year, thoughts that we lost our job, someone we loved died, was sick, and did not enjoy our daily life might fill our hearts.

But even in this situation, there is a lot to be grateful for. Our church has been offering face-to-face worship safely until now. Church Sunday Schools for adults also reopened. And, although limited, all three churches did not stop trying to help their neighbors with the resources of the church. We granted a scholarship to an ISU student, and helped a neighbor through a Quilt Group.

Also, Epworth Church will reopen its Tuesday free dinners on Nov 11 to serve local residents. And the helping hand for the church's finances continues. Although I can't mention all of them, all members of the three churches are working hard to do their part. I appreciate all this work.

However, the essential gratitude in the Bible is not gratitude for any one situation. The good or bad of a situation can change at any time. Also, whether we do a lot of work or not can change depending on the situation.

The text of Deuteronomy we consider together today is Moses' last sermon. In this sermon, Moses mentions three reasons why the Israelites should be grateful. Moses in his sermons says that the children of God, the Israelites, are blessed people. May we gain the wisdom to organize the year well through the message Moses gives us. Let's look at the reasons behind the thanks that Moses offers.

Body: Three blessings of Moses

1. It is happy to hear, read, and get close to God's Word.

Moses says, blessing the Israelites. **“The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Se'ir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran, he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.”(Deuteronomy 33:2)**

This verse says what God's Word is. In other words, what is God's presence with us and what he gives to us is the Word. It is the Word that God came to give us that is at the core of the most important and necessary things; while many heavenly angels escorted God. So, the words of the Bible are the words of God's revelation.

But what is surprising is **Deuteronomy 33:3 that follows, “He loved His people; all those consecrated to Him were in His hand; so they followed in thy steps, receiving direction from thee”**

This verse states how God gives the precious Word to all people without discrimination. So, if we cannot truly hear God's Word, it is not the Lord's fault, but our fault if we distance ourselves from God's Word because of our sin.

By the way, the Lord loves us and wants to be with us and keep us all close by the Lord. The Lord doesn't give us this grace because we deserve it. You know, we don't deserve the Lord's grace, rather it is because the Lord loves us so much.

But here is the question we have: The Lord loves us, so why does He give us the Word? Wouldn't it be better if He gave us what we need right now, like money, health, and meeting our needs? The answer to this is

clear: The Word is the most essential thing for us. In Book of Hebrews it says, **“It is faith that conquered kingdoms.”(Hebrews11:33)** But faith comes from hearing. Faith does not grow unless we hear and read God's Word. The Word of God is the food for our soul. We can gain strength from eating it. So, in order for our soul to live with strength, there must be a need for the Word of God.

Thus, the Word of God empowers our souls, makes our souls wise, and makes our faith grow. It also challenges many people and leads them to the truth. That is why God gives us the Word by making us sit at His feet.

Jesus spoke clearly to us. **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”(Matthew4:4)** This verse is set in the wilderness of temptation of Jesus. This is what Jesus said when he most needed food, clothing, and shelter.

So Moses says. The first reason the Israelites should be grateful is that we have become a people who can listen, read, and meditate on God's Word. So what is the reason for the second gratitude?

2. We are happy because of the faith community that we can be together.

Let's look at **Deuteronomy 33:5**. **“Thus the LORD became king in Jesh'urun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.”**

This verse tells us that when the Lord became king of Israel, he called all of Israel together. The leaders of Israel gathered, and the 12 tribes gathered together.

From Deuteronomy 33:6, Moses' blessing for the 12 tribes of Israel follows. Joseph becomes rich. Judah fights well. Levi is a priest. Reuben's number of tribes increases.

By the way, each of these blessings sustains one Israel. In other words, Israel is safe because of the fighting tribe of Judah. Also, Israel's prosperity was due to the wealth-making tribe of Joseph.

And it is the devotion of the tribe of Levi that Israel has the teaching of the law. As each tribe is blessed in this way, the blessing benefits other tribes as well. In other words, individual blessings benefit the community. This is because they are closely connected to each other.

So it's fortunate to have a community (home, work, church, local community) we can belong to together. In particular, we are grateful that we belong to the body of the church of God, a spiritual community.

We are enjoying the benefits of belonging to the ecclesial community of God. If you are at peace now, you are at peace because someone answers prayers for you.

All of this is what we enjoy when we are part of a community. If we are alone, we can never enjoy these blessings. There are so many benefits from being together like this. We do things we can't do alone. We see things we cannot see. When we are together, we overcome what we cannot overcome alone.

Therefore, in the Covid-19 pandemic, we can live a life of faith like this because the community is protecting us. **So Psalm 133:1 sings like this, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"** It is a great blessing to be with those who God has chosen and bound together in community with us.

Let's be thankful for being together. Let's value being together. In particular, let us value the church community that God has created. Now, finally, let's look at the reasons of thanks.

3. Thank you for being able to fulfill our mission.

We are grateful to have the mission the Lord has given us.

Deuteronomy 33:29 says. “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you; and you shall tread upon their high places.”

The enemy here is the mission. We are saved by the love of the Lord's cross. But after being saved, the child of faith is given a mission. This mission is to fight forces against God. In other words, if we know a little,

we fight against God with knowledge, with material things, and fight with those who resist God with their own power.

The world confines those whom God loves in darkness, makes them worship idols, makes them anxious, and makes them live without freedom with fear. Our mission is save them.

However, it is not the way of the world and my way, but the way that Jesus taught and showed us how to fight. The way is to fight with the power of Jesus' love. With that power, we pray, serve our neighbors, and live with confidence in our faith.

The Lord promises us. **“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And he thrust out the enemy before you, and said, Destroy.”(Deuteronomy 33:27)**

God becomes our dwelling place. And God not only saves us, but keeps us forever and is with us. So we never complain about the difficulties we face. Rather, we are grateful, and we experience God more through our mission.

Conclusion: Happy believers

To be happy, we can do the following: Don't compare ourselves to others. Do not take for granted what we enjoy now. Do our best in what the Lord has entrusted to us. And train ourselves to confess gratitude. As children of God, yearn for the Word of God more, value the church community, and be more loyal to the mission entrusted to us by the Lord. Then we will become happy believers.