

Deut 26:1-11

Martin Lloyd Jones, pastor of Westminster Chapel in England, explained human nature in these terms: Inside our human hearts we have two baggage areas where we store our memories. One baggage area has our bad memories. The other one stores all our happy memories. The condition of human nature is that these two baggage areas get all mixed up together due to a leak in them. In the area of the good memories, some bad ones get in, and then we lose our attitude of thankfulness. The bad memories crowd out the good ones, we lose the capability to have new perspective and interpretation about our life situation and people those around us. Remember the story of Joseph, Joseph's confession to his brothers after Jacob passed away: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." This Thanksgiving week is a time to sort out our mixed up memories and mend the leaking areas between the two baggage areas. In this process of mending, I hope your recollections can bring you new perspectives and new interpretations of all your memories of life. This might involve your children, parents, spouses, teachers, friends, neighbors. Think about them with new perspective in the mystery of God and God's goodness and faithfulness.

A good way to understand Thanksgiving Day is to observe the way the Israelites celebrated their very first day of Thanksgiving.

In our text today we learn how the people of Israel celebrated with their crops and thankful hearts, in detail. The main root of thanksgiving comes to us from the Israelites who were in the wilderness for 40 years and finally, coming into the promise land, through much hardship, they planted and grew their first crops in their new land. Before they even entered into the land of the promise land, God gave them detailed instructions as to how to offer their thanks to God. So it is important for us to refocus on God's instructions to observe this thanksgiving celebration meaningfully.

The first thing they had to do was preparing the baskets with the very first crops and fruits of their harvest labor and offer them on the altar.

Alex Haley, the author of "Roots," had an unusual picture hanging on his office wall. It was a picture of a turtle on top of a fence post. When asked, "Why is that there?" Alex Haley answered, "Every time I write something

significant, every time I read my words and think that they are wonderful, and I begin to feel proud of myself, then I look at the turtle on top of the fence post and remember that he didn' t get there on his own. He had help."

This is the basis of thankfulness - to remember that we got here with the help of God, and that God is the provider of every blessing we have. Have you ever worked on a farm or in a small garden? The first fruits, the crops produced from the earth are not produced by accident.

The ground has to be prepared carefully, and the Rows are laid out, and the seeds planted, watered and fertilized. Then, little by little small sprouts appear and small flowers grow and become fruit or a vegetable with farmer' s sweat and effort. Yet, these farming efforts bring about results from nature. Farmers couldn' t boast about the crops, as they began to realize farming is totally depended on the soil, sun, rain, wind and other factors. As the people of Israel prepared their thanksgiving by making baskets and putting their first fruits into them and laying them on the altar, they realized all blessings come from God. When we worship God this Thanksgiving Sunday, we need to have the same humble hearts. All that we have comes from God. Psalms 103:2 bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget none of his benefits: Thanksgiving Day is the day to think and remember where all my blessings come from.

After they gave their gifts on the altar, they prayed a prayer of Thanksgiving. What was the content of their prayer of Thanksgiving?

There' s the true story of the mother who asked her 4 yr. old son to say grace at the dinner table. The family all bowed their heads and folded their hands... and they waited. And they waited. After a few moments of silence, the mom looked over at the boy. The boy looked first at her and then at his father, then back to her again. And finally, he said, "But if I thank God for the broccoli, won' t he know I' m lying?" In this text today we can' t find any focus in the prayer of thanksgiving on material things that they have or have not such as "houses, health, cars, wealth etc. etc." What it really focused in their prayer of thanksgiving was the continuing presence of God and walking with them in their whole life' s journey—from the land of Egypt, 40 years in the wilderness with the pillar of cloud, pillar of fire and Manna until now. God had been with them all the way. That was what they were most thankful for. They expressed their very deep and mature faith in this prayer.

In America, 102 people came to America and landed on Plymouth Rock to have freedom of faith. At the beginning of their time here there was a very severe winter and many died of weakness, disease, and starvation. Then in the spring they planted seeds, but the grasshoppers and insects destroyed most of them without many crops. In the first Thanksgiving Day in America, there were many heartaches, sicknesses, loneliness, hungry and despair. There were some families who faced the death of loved ones, and was it a good reason to give thanks that they alone were the survivors? I am richer than other people.

I am smarter than other people. NO !!! I don' t think so. There was hardly any reason to celebrate at that time. But in this kind of situation, the pilgrims trusted and remembered that God saw their tears and God' s continuing presence was within their whole life pilgrimage no matter what the circumstances were.

In the same way people today have lost their loved ones and important elements in their lives as the pilgrims did after they arrived in the new land of America. Maybe this 2010 Thanksgiving Day will be the first year Thanksgiving Day since you have lost loved ones and have lost important elements in your lives. Maybe you have gone through some sorrow this year, or some painful experience. Please remember that God' s eternal presence and healing touch for you and the mystery of Life that God can take the thorns in our lives and change them into amazing resources to touch our people' s deep wounded broken hearts, Scars into stars like the dusty dirty ground, that out of it can come crops to support our lives and bring us food. This is a real reason and content for the prayer of thanksgiving, the mystery of God and God' s continuing presence in all our circumstances. David says in Psalm 23, that he had experienced God in his journey, knowing God' s faithfulness and continuing presence. "Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. This is our continuing spiritual task let people know that God is with us, God' s eternal presence in all our circumstances.

The people of Israel celebrated after the prayer. Then they celebrated by sharing Foods and inviting outsiders. Two kinds of people were invited during this time; the alien and the Levite. These people had no land and they could not grow any crops. They probably felt lonely and cold with nothing. They had nothing to celebrate for.

Inviting with radical hospitality those people who don't have anything to celebrate is God's clear instruction to us for the celebration of this Thanksgiving Day. Let us remember that there are those around us who are not celebrating. After the service today there will be a special lunch for helping support children who need your love and care. It is a good opportunity for our thanksgiving celebration and at the same time we can share our blessings with others are in need.

Remember with humble heart that all blessings come from God. And Trust God's continuing presence with us our life's entire journey, no matter what has happened to us. And we invite those who have nothing, and we long to share our blessings with others. This makes our Thanksgiving Day very memorable, and I hope this year's Thanksgiving is especially wonderful and joyous for you. Amen

