

8 “Carefully follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and take possession of the land the LORD swore to your ancestors. ² Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out, and your feet did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Keep in mind that the LORD your God has been disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. ⁶ So keep the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills; ⁸ a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where you will eat food without shortage, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you will mine copper. ¹⁰ When you eat and are full, you will bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

Planned Obsolescence

Somehow it seemed fitting for me to begin the Thanksgiving Eve devotion by complaining about something. That thing is planned obsolescence. That’s the company that decides, “We’re going to make a product that breaks so you have to buy another one.” It’s that company that decides we’ll make toner cost more than the printer. Or your vehicle will mechanically total itself. These things make my blood boil. They anger me just a bit as well as encourage me to buy old... really old or make do without.

But what if there was something else that was designed to fail. A test designed to fail. That sounds like a teacher who hates his or her students unless, unless there was a lesson being taught. What if it is the Almighty God who loves us and so he disciplines us and tested his people by putting them through the gauntlet of the wilderness in order to humble them? Planned obsolescence, planned failure, planned humiliation. Ouch.

The truth is we can’t humble ourselves. God must do it for us. And Moses reminds the Israelites the purpose for their wilderness wanderings: “*so that he might humble you*” so that when they receive the good things from God they won’t forget the giver but recognize from where all the good things come.

Planned Obsolescence

But you might wonder, “How could they forget?” They were there when God delivered them with the plagues. They were there when they walked through on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left. They were at the foot of Mount Sinai when they heard with their own ears God speaking to them. How could they forget?

It comes naturally, doesn’t it? We remember the gift but forget the giver. It was only natural for Israel too. The Lord led them into the wilderness for 40 years because they only saw the strength and size of the Canaanites and not their God who led the way, who fought for them, delivers them, rescues them. They complained when there was no water and there was no food. They even accused him with snark, “*Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die?*” Each time they were tested and each time they failed. It was a lesson they needed to learn. This test was designed to undermine their dependence on self, self-reliance and replace that with trust in God.

A lesson we need to learn too. Otherwise we begin to sound like Nebuchadnezzar, “It is by my strength and my might that I have these blessings. I’m a self-made man.” We too forget that everything is a gift from God. We usually say, “*he gave me my body and soul, eyes ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life.*” It’s a lesson we need to learn and relearn because we forget that God gives us everything even the most basic things of life.

We’ve been given good gifts from God. And we shouldn’t relegate God’s good gifts simply to the fact that all we have to look forward to is death and life everlasting. God gives good things now. But we too forget the giver and sometimes we even forget the gift. How often do we give thanks when all is going as we think it should? But then our heart skips a beat or the dollar begins to falter and then it’s the end of the world, “God where are you?” We’re no better than Israel. At least they were honest even if they were snarky. We do the same things. We behave just like them. And yes their issues, our issues are serious. How long do you expect to live without food or water in the wilderness? These are serious issues and what they do is illustrate what we are capable of without God... what we can and can’t do. It’s humiliating.

Like a test we’ve failed not because the test is designed that way but because of who we are: sinners. We’re no better than the product that breaks after a short period of time. We can’t humble ourselves. We must be humbled by God.

That’s what Israel was to remember. They were taught to rely on God. Depend on him for everything. This was the same lesson that Jesus instilled in his disciples when it came to feeding the 5,000, “*You feed them.*” It’s the same lesson that Jesus understood when he was in the wilderness for 40 days and nights, “*Turn these stones into bread.*” Since you can’t trust God to provide for you, do something. Jesus’ response was from Deuteronomy 8:3 - *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet he is without sin. Since we couldn’t save ourselves, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we’ve done but because of his great mercy. We need a substitute and that is what we have. We have a God who loves us so much that he sent his one and only son. We have a God who took our place under the burden of sin and death that we deserved. He took the weight of God’s wrath against sin upon his shoulders and he was broken for us. We can be thankful for this gift.

But then he does even more for us. He rose again to reassure us, death can’t harm you anymore. and then he promises, “I’ve gone before you and I will go with you. Don’t be afraid.” “*The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land.*” Israel entered that land and God again demonstrated that it wouldn’t be by their strength, their might, their obedience but by his grace and mercy. It was no coincidence that upon entering the Promised Land, God handicapped all of their fighting men with circumcision. It was no coincidence that God had them conquer Jericho by walking around it at a distance. This was all to show that God was giving them the land. So that they might believe the promise and remember that even when life isn’t going well God loves them.

“*Keep in mind that the Lord your God has been disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son*” (Deuteronomy 8:5). God was treating them like his children.

He treats us like his children and that is who we are. We may forget the giver and his gifts. We may even accuse him of giving us a test designed to fail but we have a good God who promises a good land. And he forgives our every sin and points us back to his Word and Promises. And we can enjoy the good that God gives us. We can rejoice with our brothers and sisters in Christ, in our Church and in our synod. We can recall what God has done for us. How he humbled but then restored us to live a new and holy life as those forgiven and loved by God. Faith that holds on to the goodness of God despite our depravity and Faith trusts that God will provide. No matter what we are cared for. We are blessed.

So maybe I shouldn't have complained on Thanksgiving Eve. And yes, it's wrong to say this test is designed to fail us. We fail entirely on our own. Rather his desire for you is to bless you and keep you, to make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. So when you eat and are full, bless the Lord your God for his good son, this good land, and the eternal life he has in store for us.