

This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. ²Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. ³He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.

¹⁰*You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. ¹¹Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. ¹⁷Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. ¹⁹If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. ²⁰Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.*

We were five or six, sitting around a table as we waited for our daughters or sons to swim their next event. Just last Saturday we were gathered there, with time to chat, and snack, and read. One was a Lutheran, me, another a Baptist, the rest Roman Catholics, I think. I know them all well enough to know that each is active in the church, worshipping, praying, serving. But last Saturday as we chatted we were complaining. How hard we work, how tired we get, how much we have to do to keep up with it all. Never time for ourselves - always so much being asked. "Ain't it awful," was the song we sang. Our stomachs full, our children laughing, healthy, each of us privileged to have such an easy day. Yet "Ain't we got it tough," was the chorus.

Was the Lord listening in last Saturday? Was he troubled by what he heard? Confused? Did he hear our words alongside of the prayers of mothers holding starving children? Were our complaints mingled with the conversations of soldiers afraid they may soon enter battle? Did our discouragement come to him even as he heard the pleading of the mother stricken with MS?

Thanksgiving. Every church in this town ought to be bursting at the seams. Every sentence we speak might well be a hymn of praise. Who has been blessed as we have been blessed?

If only the ones who have gone before us could be here right now. They left Czechoslovakia, or Hungary or Poland, or Germany or Norway. They left hard times, oppression, hunger, dreaming of a land of freedom and opportunity. Could they see us today, walk in our shoes, live in our homes, wear our clothes, go here and there in our cars, would they not say, "The dream came true. Beyond our wildest imaginings the dream came true."

But listen to our words: "Another day - more troubles - more trials - so weary. Our God just shakes his head, confused.

Once, the Lord spoke through his prophet Moses. His people had been slaves in Egypt, he had won their release. For forty years of wandering in the wilderness he had fed them, gave them water to drink, provided them with clothing. "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing. And you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Moses could have been describing America - certainly he speaks to us more than three thousand years later. Remember.

What wilderness has the Lord brought you through? A time of sickness, a time of poverty, a time of grief and loss? Remember. Remember where you were five thanksgivings ago. Remember what you feared, ten and twenty and thirty years ago. Can you sing with the hymn writer, "Through many dangers toils and snares I have already come, 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace shall lead me home."

Many of you are facing a wilderness time right now. Sickness, grief, pain, not enough money to pay the bills. Remember. Remember that the Lord promises there will be a promised land when the wilderness journey is over. Many of us will cross the Jordan many times yet in this life. All who belong to Christ shall cross into the Promised Land at death. Remember.

As you remember, continually remember all that the Lord has given, all that the Lord has done, Thanksgiving will become a habit of your heart. Weariness and complaining will no longer be the marks of our lives, but giving thanks the habit of our hearts.

Once giving thanks is the habit of your heart, make it also the habit of your lips. Let us hear words of your gratitude. Say to the people of your life, "God has blessed me in you." Take time to speak these words to your family, to parents, spouse, children, grandchildren.

Take time to speak these words to the church. "God has blessed me in all of you. You care for me, pray for me, listen to me, what a great blessing."

God has blessed me, Lynn Schlessman, by letting me be a part of you.

Take time to speak these words to the people of your life: friends, co workers. "God has blessed me in you, blessed me with laughter, and play, with people I can turn to in every need."

But do not leave thanksgiving a habit only of the heart and the lips. Let thanksgiving also be a habit of your hands. In the year 1947 the Board of Missions of the American Lutheran Church committed 3800 dollars per year to support a new ministry in Avon Lake. Through those early years and every year since many others gave of their time and their wealth so that a latecomer like me might worship in this fine place. Remember what the gifts and sacrifices of others have meant as you give to support a Hispanic ministry in Lorain. Remember that a coming generation will give thanks for what you have prepared for them. Remember.

Tomorrow is but one day. Giving thanks can become the habit of every day, the habit of your heart, and lips and hands.