

## **Remembering God's Faithfulness Deuteronomy 8:1-10**

### **Daydreaming and Remembering**

Summer is a low season for the church. People go on vacation, making wonderful memories with family and friends. That's not a bad thing. What is your favorite place for vacation? the beach, mountains, rivers or maybe an all-inclusive resort? For me, it's the mountains. Of course, not all of us are able to go to our favorite vacation spot but there is still a way we can enjoy those moments without physically being there. Early this year, I participated in an online sabbath retreat program offered by Boston University School of Theology. In that retreat, I learned about the importance and meaning of sabbath and several spiritual practices that help me to rest in the midst of my busy schedule. One of them was day dreaming. Day dreaming is easy. You can simply imagine that you are in your favorite place or any place you want to be. Let us practice it together. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Inhale, and exhale, inhale and exhale. When your breath becomes slow and comfortable, remember or imagine that you are in your favorite place with your favorite people. Focus on what you see and feel. Remain in that moment for a while. I bet not all of you were in the mountains. How was it? This simple practice of day dreaming can help us to catch our breath and relax a little bit from our busy lives.

We can do this practice because of our memory. Memory not only stores what we have experienced in the past but can also recreate the same feeling of joy and happiness we felt at that moment. It can bring us back to that pleasant moment and place. It has been said, "God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December." Memory allows us to cherish and relive beautiful moments from the past, even during difficult or bleak times. Memory is a channel to the past and the past is the key to the future. That's why remembering is so important for our lives and faith.

### **Remember!**

The scripture reading is the part of Moses' final exhortation to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness. What did Moses say to the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land and face the wars ahead? He did not check strategic plans for how to conquer Canaan. He did not check the state of their weapons or the training status of the soldiers. The message Moses repeatedly conveyed through the entire book of Deuteronomy is just one: "Remember!" The command to remember appears 20 times, and the command to "not forget" appears 14 times in Deuteronomy. The entire structure of Deuteronomy chapter 8 is built around the commands to "remember" and "not forget." The passage we read today also begins with the command, "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness." As Israelites are about to face a new future, Moses tells them, to remember the 40 years in the wilderness.

What were those 40 years in the wilderness like for the Israelites? They lived as slaves in Egypt. They lived without dreams, purpose and of course, without rest in Egypt. Their daily goal was to get bread for survival. During the wilderness years, they ate the Manna and quail provided by God and learned to live a life dependent on God's grace. They learned that "One does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." The wilderness time was a period of learning to wash away the slave mentality ingrained in their bodies and minds from long years of slavery. It was a time to relearn how to live with dignity and purpose as God's people, following the commandments given by God.

Of course, life in the wilderness was not always sweet. They complained to God when there was no water. When Moses went up Mount Sinai and did not come down for a long time, they made an idol and worshiped it, calling it the god that saved them. They hesitated in fear when God commanded them to go up to the Promised Land, and when God told them to stop, they foolishly went to war and were defeated. They also trembled in fear before God's judgment. The 40 years in the wilderness were filled with memories the Israelites wanted to forget, memories of shame they wished to quickly put behind them. Yet Moses tells them to remember those 40 years.

Why is that? Because all those memories from the 40 years came together to form who they are as God's people. More importantly, God was with them in all those moments of success and failure, obedience and disobedience. So Moses is telling the Israelites to remember every one of those moments, to remember God, God who saved them. God who quenched their thirst and fulfilled their hunger. God remembered his covenant with their ancestor and faithfully kept that covenant even when they didn't. Their identity, their very life, depended on that 'sacred memory.' That's why Moses repeatedly emphasized throughout Deuteronomy, "Remember" and "Do not forget", urging them to "Remember fiercely."

Take a moment to reflect on your own journey of faith. Are there moments of such gratitude and joy that you can never forget them? Or are there memories so painful, distressing, or embarrassing that you wish to erase them from your mind? No one has only painful memories or only happy ones. Happiness and unhappiness, joy and sorrow, obedience and disobedience—all these moments weave together to form our memories and shape our confession of faith. And it is a grace to have a community of faith that has shared and woven those memories of faith together over the past 50 years.

Do not try to remember only the good memories. The memories of pain and hurt also enrich and beautify our lives and faith. [ppt] Please see the screen. What do you see? A beautiful tapestry. This is beautiful because of many different colors of threads. God uses and weaves not only our happy memories but also our painful ones to shape us into a beautiful church. So, in this time of mid-year pause, take some time and remember your life journey and what God has been doing through all these moments.

Going back to the daydreaming exercise, we did at the beginning of this sermon, this practice can be applied to reflecting on our life journey. Find a quiet place in your home. Close your eyes and relaxed your body. Take a deep breath and exhale. Repeat it a few times until your body is relaxed. Then, remember a moment when you vividly felt the presence of God in your life. It may have come as a sense of awe or wonder. Where were you and what happened? How did you feel when you felt God so near you? If you felt this when you were in the valley of the shadow of death, where was God? Those memories will tend the fire in your soul and keep your love of God burning. My beloved Asbury family, during this summer, remember God's faithfulness and find rest in God. Amen.