

Sermon Reading: Deuteronomy 8:1-9

Sermon Theme: Walk in the Way of the Lord

They say hindsight is 20/20 vision: you supposedly see the past more clearly. But sometimes we see it with rose-colored glasses where it's a lot more glamorous and glorious than it really was. Other times, we see it with different glasses and it seems more depressing and disappointing. But more importantly than how we see the past is how we use those memories and how they affect your life. Obviously some memories are much more impactful on our lives than others. The birth of a child or death of a family member is going to have a more resounding affect than your favorite food you remember you ate when you were 9 years old.

Today, God invites us to reminisce, to think about what has happened in the past. Our sinful pride often leads us to see the hardships in life as evidence that God neither loves us nor cares for us and so we shouldn't follow the way of the Lord. But working through his Word, remembering His actions in the past and with His promises for the future, the Lord leads us to walk in His way.

Moses knew that his time was short. The people of Israel are about to cross over into the Promised Land of Canaan, but as a consequence for a sin he had committed Moses wouldn't be going with them. But, instead of being bitter and dwelling on the negative thinking about how everything went wrong for him, Moses uses this time to encourage the people of Israel. He urges them to look back and to remember. Moses says in v.2, **“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”**

As the Lord is all-knowing, he already knew what was in the people's hearts. In fact, he knows every inclination of man's heart is sinful and evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21). But in his love and mercy, he sought to bring about the greatest good for his people. And so, he humbled and tested them. Moses references in v. 3 how the Lord caused them to hunger. That testing certainly was anything but pleasant. It was miserable. And when the Lord tests us the devil is right there tempting. The people then grumble and complain, **“Why have you brought us out into this desert to die?”** But this need of food taught the people, it humbled them, and reminded them that in this barren land there is only One who can help.

And the testing continues with how the Lord provides. Moses says they were fed with manna, **“which neither you nor your ancestors had known”** (v.3). Again, it was to teach the people that it wasn't by their own hands that they were fed. It wasn't because they learned to raise crops for themselves that they survived. No, the people would have to humbly confess, *“We don't know what this food is, and we can't even really describe it so that you could understand it. But we do know it was bread from heaven which the Lord gave.”* They would have to humbly acknowledge that their existence was entirely dependent on the Lord and that they did not **live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

That testing would still continue as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The people naturally would have wondered, “*How much can we keep this up, before our clothes wear out and our health fails?*” But again the Lord provides. In that hot, barren wilderness Moses says, “**Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during those forty years.**” Some bible commentators explain it that the people must have brought extra clothing or purchased some along the way. But the Israelites learned the truth: nothing is impossible for God. The Lord can and does provide for our needs in ways that we cannot fully understand or explain.

Why did God test and humble his people? As a parent teaches their child by disciplining them, as those in authority discipline those entrusted to their care, so the Lord was disciplining his people so they might turn from their own wicked ways and live. He was teaching them to trust in him to provide for their needs and to take care of them wherever they would go. He was teaching them to not boast in themselves and their own capabilities but to praise and thank him for his goodness, mercy, and love.

And so God does with you, His people. Your God wants you to look back and remember how he has provided and taken care of you. He wants us to see how not just during the good times but even during the hard times of our lives he has been with us and leading us. There have been years when the Lord has caused us to hunger, when the money hasn’t always been there, when the people have not always been present, when we haven’t felt fulfilled in life, or satisfied with how things were going. You know when it has been difficult and you have grumbled and complained. We can be quick to recall and bring up the hard and bleak years even during the good times because you’re sure that the bad is going to set in again. No, those times weren’t pleasant. And, yes, we do want to avoid them and plan accordingly. But do not forget how the Lord uses those times to show us our own weaknesses and to remind us our help is in the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

He wants you to see that he is the one who provided for you with all that you have and all you need for daily life. He gives you your daily bread even without your asking. He has seen to it that, although we are hard-pressed from every side and it feels like the weight of the world is bearing down us, we are not crushed. He wants you to remember—something I wonder how much we forget to appreciate—that he keeps us in the one true faith during the good and the bad. Through the words of his mouth given to us in his Word, he has made you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. Through the Law, he silences any boasting in ourselves. Through the gospel, he gives us the true bread/manna from heaven, Jesus Christ. In him we have everlasting life. In him we boast.

As we remember and think about all that he has done for us, walk in the way of the Lord being careful to follow him according to his Word. Walk in the way of the Lord with the confidence that comes from his promises.

Moses knew where the Lord was going to lead the people of Israel. They had been looking forward to it for so long. The Lord would bring them into a good land, **a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills;** ⁸ **a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;** ⁹ **a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills”** (v.7-9). But still Moses is not bitter, although he wouldn't enjoy this land himself. He wasn't bitter because he trusted in the promise that God had given to Abraham that through his line all nations on earth would be blessed. The Savior of the world would come from God's people Israel and Moses knew that through this Savior, all who believed in him would not perish, but have eternal life. Moses knew that even though he was going to die, he was looking forward to a different Promised Land. This land is perfect in every way, there is no sadness or tears, hunger or pain, no disappointment or lacking of anything. Yes, Moses would die, but by God's grace he would live forever in heaven.

As we face our future and what it holds for us, there is much that we do not know. There are so many questions that we wish we had answers to but simply don't. There are doubts and questions about our personal and family lives, the future of our church, the school. And as God did for his people Israel, God does for you his people: he encourages you with his promises.

When looking at the financial report, the offerings that are coming in versus the expenses going out, and comparing that to our congregation, one may start to wonder, "What are we going to do? We can't keep going like this." To that Jesus gives you the promise: not even the gates of hell itself can overcome his church (Matthew 16:18). Do we need to be wise, faithful stewards? Of course. But do you think some money problems are going to stop God's Word from being spread when even the gates of hell will not overcome His church?

One might get caught up with looking at the number of people in church; why aren't more coming? But do we neglect to see and hear Jesus' promise that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, there he is also? Think of how incredible it is that you have chosen to gather with fellow believers, to pray and praise, to worship and be strengthened in your faith, to be gathered where God comes to you to feed you with Word and Sacrament. Would it be nice to have more people with us? Of course. We want to continue to invite, to encourage, to speak with our neighbors, our friends, those who are straying. We want them to have what we have: pardon and peace with the forgiveness of sins. But don't forget what you have with each other right now. Don't let Satan rob you of the joy, lead you to despair or bemoan the number of empty pews. Instead rejoice with those who said with you, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

One might look at Zion Lutheran School and think: "*Is it worth pouring all that money into something that in reality we see very little directly benefiting our church? Is it worth it when no many members do not use this gift? Is it worth it if more members do not come from that school?*" Yes, we would like those things and pray for it. But also remember the purpose of

Zion school. We are giving children a firm foundation to build the house of their lives. God's Word is being shared and taught in its truth and purity to 32 preschool students. That's 32 little evangelizers who go home singing the gospel songs they learn in school and share the good news with mom and dad and who knows who else. There are 26 students in Kindergarten-8th grade who are given that firm foundation of Christ and shown that Christ is the center of every facet of life. More often than not we don't see how the Word works in an individual's life. But that's not what we are sent to do. We are told to plant the seed of God's Word trusting and leaving it in God's hands to do the rest. And God reassures you, "**Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain**" (1 Corinthians 15:58). It's always worth it.

Then we come to the celebration for today and the blessing we have with NELHS—Nebraska Lutheran High School. This is not a knock against our public high school and the work they do there. This isn't saying anything against you if you didn't make use of that resource. But we thank God that for 40 years God's Word has been the center of everything that is taught at Nebraska Lutheran High School. You cannot replace Christ-centered education no matter the cost, how great an education one might receive elsewhere, the sports one is able to play, the support given to home community, even the fact of growing up at home instead of living in the dorms. For God encourages you: **Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it** (Proverbs 22:6). With all the sin in this world, in our lives, NELHS provides another tool against the arrows of temptation of Satan.

Remember how God has provided for us in the past. Be encouraged with his promise for the future. All because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Fulfilling the promise he made to Adam and Eve, because of his love for you, God sent his Son, giving him up, so that you would be declared children, people of God. Because of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death all your sins were paid for and a place is prepared for you in the Promised Land of Heaven. Paul asks in Romans 8: "**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all,**" because God the Father did this for you, "**how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**"

Walk in the way of the Lord. Follow his ways. Stay connected to his Word making regular use of the Lord's Supper continuing to build on that foundation of Christ. We have the promise of an even greater land, one that is actually perfect where we will be with the Lord forever. That is why we gather on Sundays, why we have a school, why we support a Lutheran High school, why it's always worth it. We are preparing ourselves and encouraging others for that time when we will be brought out of this veil of tears in this world to the perfect home where Jesus eagerly awaits your arrival. Praise and thank God for how he has blessed us in the past. Walk in the way of the Lord confident in the promise of continued blessings for the future. Amen.