

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Remembering What Was

Old Testament Lesson

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (NRSV)

¹When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Bible/Sermon Focus

We often think that once a book of the Bible or a section in the Bible gets written down it is sealed off and never touched again, preserved for future generations, perfect in its content. This is NOT how the Jewish authors of the Old Testament worked.

The stories told of the oral tradition were slightly different in each telling, and those who heard them wrote things down differently. And then the written stories and content were also rewritten/retold and redacted for different generations.

In our story today the temple had fallen in a state of disrepair. Some of King Josiah's men found some scrolls that looked important. They brought these scrolls to a local prophet, a woman named Huldah, who was able to read the scrolls, which ended up being sections of the Torah (the Law of God).

Josiah wept and tore his clothes because he realized that the king, and therefore the people, had forgotten to keep the Law of God. So, they rewrote, redacted, and added to the Torah. This tradition is called the "Deuteronomistic History." The Deuteronomistic Source, working around 722 BCE, is known to have edited, collected and redacted not only Torah, but also the work of early prophets. The Deuteronomistic Source tends to be more rigid and "rule following" than

some other sources. They, however, did not have the last and final redaction. That would be left to the Priestly Source (another lesson for another time).

What we can and should take away from the multiple additions, redactions, edits, and differing sources of the Old Testament is...that telling and retelling our story matters.

The stories of the people of God were retold and retold to every single generation of God's people. And every single generation heard them a bit differently. For those in the time of King Josiah, the retelling of the story re-oriented the people with worship practices of their ancestors. It reminded them that they were a people who were made free by a God who made covenant with them. And that the worship of this God included giving from their own resources not as an afterthought, but as a forethought. The scrolls they found, the story they retold, provided them with the theological reasons for why they were to give, why they were to tithe (Deuteronomy 26:12), and why they were to live according to the Law of God.

And we retell the stories too. We share them with the next generation. We maintain the temple. We tithe, we give our first fruits, and we worship. We set strategic plans to do these things. And we do this because of who God is and what God has done.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your favorite stories from the Bible that you like to tell?
2. What do you want to pass on for the next generation of members at Manchester UMC?
3. What did you like most that the WIN Teams accomplished in the past four years?
4. Discuss the balance between the need to keep things the same in the church, and the need for things to change in the church.
5. Do you consider tithing (10% of income) part of your discipleship?

Prayer

God of the past, God of the future, God of the always right here, we thank you for carrying us across the generations, keeping us as your people, and remaining in covenant with us. Teach us to pass on this tradition, to tell our story, to give freely of ourselves, and all in service to you. Bless the next years of strategic planning. Help us to live into our baptismal promises and use us, o God, to guide your church into the future. Amen.

*I make this offering, an act that acknowledges
that the fruit belongs to God anyway.*