

Rev. Lisa M. Schrott  
3-6-22  
Deuteronomy 26:1-11  
Healing Through Giving

### **Prayer of Illumination**

Bring your word near to us, O God and may it reside in our hearts. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to respond to your word with our whole lives until you become our dwelling place through Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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Our scripture passage this morning is the quintessential stewardship scripture, and yes I know it is not November. I chose this passage from Deuteronomy from today's lectionary texts because I thought it would be appropriate on the Sunday when we ordain and install new officers, those who are giving of their first fruits of energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. It is also appropriate as we begin Lent and are invited into a season of deepening discipleship. So friends, trusting completely in the promise that we belong to God, that I invite you to listen for God's word to you in these words from Deuteronomy 26, words Moses spoke to the Israelites as they were about to complete their Exodus journey and enter the Promised Land.

### **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

When 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, you 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.

You 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." When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you 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. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

The 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; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So 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. Then 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. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

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When I began looking at scriptures and themes to guide us through our Lenten journey, I shared with our music leaders a few resources I had come across. We talked through them and after some additional consideration I decided to combine the themes from two sources that spoke to a desire to deepen relationships with God and each other in a way that was restorative and hopeful, rather than through a lens of deprivation, a lens that is often associated with Lent. One source<sup>1</sup> spoke of how the recurring Covid-19 pandemic has weighed us down with grief, resentment, and fear; sometimes leaving us tired, discouraged and in need of healing. That really resonated with me, since I see healing as a process of restoration. So this Lent, using scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary, we will be on a path of healing. Like many healing journeys, the path may not be linear, but we will walk through the stages together.

Our worship liturgy during Lent is adapted from the team at *A Sanctified Art* and is titled *Full to the Brim*. They write, “The origins of Lent were that one was to leave their old life behind to fast and prepare to be baptized into a new way of living. In essence, this was a practice of stepping away from corrupt power, scarcity mentality, and empty rituals in order to live a more expansive and full life of faith. And so, the Lenten theme, *Full to the Brim*, is an invitation—into a radically different Lent, into a full life. It’s an invitation to be authentically who you are, to counter scarcity and injustice at every turn, to pour out even more grace wherever it is needed. When we allow ourselves to be filled to the brim with God’s lavish love, that love spills over.”<sup>2</sup>

As I have been absorbing the news this week through it seems every pore in my body, I realized just how much I need a message of healing for a world that seems too fractured to put back together – a true Humpty Dumpty moment. And I am in need of the promise of *Full to the Brim* – a reminder to us to live fully—as we pursue justice and hope. As *A Sanctified Art* reminds us, “If love is our beginning, how can we live our lives led by love’s promises? And so, this Lent, let us trust—fully—that we belong to God. Let us increase our capacity to receive and give grace. Let us discover the expansive life God dreams for us.”<sup>3</sup>

Living an expansive life is one way for us to experience healing - for us as individuals and for us as a community. And what do I mean by “healing”? Let’s start with what I don’t mean. I don’t mean that when we get through Lent and Good Friday and celebrate the joy of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday that we will be “cured.” To be “cured” means that the diseases that afflict us are completely eliminated and we are restored to a pre-disease condition. Throughout the pandemic, we have been seeking cures. Our conversations have been peppered with questions about when we are going to “return to normal” or when we are going to get back to our “pre-covid state.”

Instead of focusing on being cured, I want us to consider what it might mean to embrace healing. Healing connotes that one becomes healthy again, whole in body, mind and spirit. And in scripture healings often led to people and communities to be even healthier than they were previously. Jesus’ healings functioned to both restore an individual and restore community. New Testament professor John Carroll argues that “Jesus steps beyond the conventionally drawn social boundaries, offering healing to persons who, both because of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/11169/walk-the-path-of-healing-for-your-church>

<sup>2</sup> *A Sanctified Art* <https://sanctifiedart.org/full-to-the-brim-lent-bundle-year-c>

<sup>3</sup> *A Sanctified Art* <https://sanctifiedart.org/full-to-the-brim-lent-bundle-year-c>

their social status and their sickness are estranged from human community.”<sup>4</sup> We seem to have a lot of estrangement from human community going on in our world today – way too much estrangement.

Healing is a participatory process and it can be bi-directional. As we seek to be healers in our world, we ourselves receive healing. Henri Nouwen embraces this understanding of healing in his book *Reaching Out*. He writes about healing as a form of hospitality. We become healers when we connect to the other, and for Nouwen that is in a shared story. He says, “... healing means first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention.” It is in the empty spaces where healing can happen.”<sup>5</sup>

It is in the empty spaces where we can give of ourselves – give ourselves completely. Where we can remember what God has done for us. And respond not with our leftovers, but with our first fruits. This is what Moses told the Israelites as they were getting ready to enter the Promised Land. To remember and to give.

Moses told them to tell their story: “When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt...; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.”

The headline read, “***On the Exodus West, the Israelites Flee Hardship for an Uncertain Future.***” And it continued, “Many thousands of Israelites, fearful of the war, are leaving their homes on a slow journey west, enduring difficulties but also buoyed by the generosity of others.” Except that it didn’t. The headline in Thursday’s New York Times<sup>6</sup> wasn’t written about the Israelites, but instead the Ukrainians. And yet...and yet... the words of scripture ran through this article as if Moses himself had written it. The article spoke of the generosity that the refugees were receiving... the milk and honey from local families who delivered mattresses and blankets and packages of food to travelers grabbing spots to sleep on hallway floors of buildings of all sorts.

Moses said, “So 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.” And Davide Martello, dubbed the “Piano Man,” a German musician set his piano down at the Polish border and bowed down to play *We are the Champions* and John Lennon’s *Imagine* as refugees streamed across the border<sup>7</sup>.

Moses said, “Then 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.” And refugees and volunteers in a camp in Romania sang Happy Birthday to a seven-year old,

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<sup>4</sup> John T. Carroll. Sickness and healing in the New Testament gospels. *Interpretation* 49.2; 1995 p5

<sup>5</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Reaching Out*. New York: Doubleday & Company; 1975 p67

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/europe/ukraine-refugees-exodus.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.firstpost.com/world/russia-ukraine-conflict-piano-man-from-germany-greets-ukrainians-at-polish-border-with-we-are-the-champions-10431731.html>

giving her cake, balloons, and a gift.<sup>8</sup> The hundreds of donation centers popping up throughout Europe filled with winter clothing and diapers, and toys. People sharing their homes with strangers - the bounty the Lord God has blessed people with that they are now sharing. And the ultimate gift that people are giving, sacrificing their safety and even their lives. People like Naveen Shekharappa, a fourth-year medical student from India living in Kharkiv, who was killed when he left a bunker on Tuesday to fetch food for those with whom he was sheltered.<sup>9</sup> These countless acts of giving are sparks of hope, igniting a fire of compassion and seeking to heal the breaches left by the relentless and demoralizing shelling and fighting.

Seeking healing of our world through giving of yourself – that sounds like something Jesus might be on board with. At least Bob Goff thinks so. Goff is the founder and president of the nonprofit *Love Does*, which fights for the rights of children around the world. Goff tells a story about when he was child saving up his change to take the corner candy store. It was highlight of his week. One week Goff was a penny short. The shopkeeper, while continuing to chat with him, took some vinegar and salt and rubbed one of his pennies, making it shine as if it had just been minted. The shopkeeper then told Goff, that in his store shiny pennies counted as two pennies, so Goff had enough to buy his chocolate.

Goff shares that after the shopkeeper made this pronouncement, he believed him – that shiny pennies are worth two. He said that he didn't just believe him because I was a kid and he was an adult. He believed him because of who he was. Goff said, "Words spoken by kind people have the ability to endure in our lives. Its over forty years later and when I see a shiny penny, I still instinctively think – shiny pennies are worth two." Goff concludes, by saying , "Jesus was always talking about a reverse economy. He talked about how if you want to receive, you give. If you want to lead, you follow. That the poor are rich...that following Jesus means doing the math differently sometimes."<sup>10</sup>

Doing the math differently is our call. Our newly ordained and installed officers are doing the math differently. Giving of their time and talents – precious commodities in our world, serving God by being the church, the body of Christ.

This Lenten season, we are each invited and challenged to do the math differently. To do the math differently and give of ourselves – give our first fruits to be agents of transformation. As individuals, as community, as the world – we are all in need of healing. God invites us to the path of healing through giving. May it be so. Join me in prayer.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/refugee-camp-throws-birthday-celebration-7-year-old-ukrainian-girl-1685113>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/indian-student-ukraine-death.html>

<sup>10</sup> Bob Goff. *Love Does*. Nelson Books. 2012 p.112