

the fruit of the ground.” Because we are not farmers, we might miss the meaning here. If I take the first of all the fruit to the temple, it requires that I stop in the midst of the harvest. I can’t set it aside and wait until the harvest is over. It will spoil. But if I stop in the midst of the harvest, the rest of the harvest might spoil. Worship is an intentional act of stopping in the midst of busy lives in order to remind ourselves that ultimately God will provide.

How hard is that for you? We live in a 24/7 world. That is just reality. The world does not stop for us to go to church. There are phone calls to make, business deals to consider, and people to see. That is just the reality of the world in which we live. But *what does it matter if you gain the whole world, but lose your soul?* Moses knows.

“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, ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor.’” Worship is a unique form of remembering. We come to worship to be reminded of who we are. I am not my job. I am not my possessions. I am not the car I drive, or the neighborhood in which I live, or the designer labels that I wear. I am God’s beloved, saved by grace. Never forget! Worship is never about whether we were entertained by the music or the sermon. Instead, worship is the experience of remembrance.

Every Sunday, we close our worship experience with these words, “Go from this place . . .” If we have worshiped with remembrance, we are prepared to leave this place and go back into our worlds of work and pressure with a renewed sense of who I am. And that makes a difference.

*I didn’t get that business contract and it’s tough to make ends meet, but I know that I will be okay because I am God’s beloved.*

*The doctor said that the prognosis is not good, but I can face the uncertainty of the days ahead because I know who’s in charge.*

*Our family is really struggling right now. There is so much misunderstanding with everyone. But we are going to work through this because we know who we are. Moses knows.*

“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.” Worship is remembrance, but it also celebration. But don’t overlook the aliens. The aliens are the disinherited, the marginalized, the exiled. The aliens are an in-your-face reminder that God cares for the marginalized. We need the aliens in our worship even more than they need us. Moses knows.

In just a moment, we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This is a particular ordinance of remembrance. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” As we remember Jesus’ sacrifice, remember who you are and be glad.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, The Wisdom of the Desert, p. 5.



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# The Pulpit Ministry



February 25, 2007  
First Sunday of Lent

Moses  
Knows

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

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It is the season of Lent. We are journeying to Easter, but for the next forty days, we will be in the desert. So, what do we do in the desert? In the fourth century, a group of Christians struggled to know how to be a Christian in a pagan, secular society. They found it hard to keep a right perspective, to maintain the proper priorities, to sustain spiritual discipline in a corrupt society and they sensed that they were in danger of losing their very souls. Most of us understand how soul depleting daily life can be.

Some of these Christians left careers, homes, families and moved to the desert. This was the beginning of the monastic movement. In his treatise on the desert fathers, Thomas Merton notes, "What the fathers sought most of all was their own true self, in Christ."<sup>1</sup> These early Christians went to the desert, not just in rebellion against their decadent society, but to find a spiritual center, a soul focal point, an inner anchor for their spiritual lives.

Most of us would agree that it is easy to lose our souls in the midst of our hectic lives. How can we find a spiritual anchor? Few of us will be able to literally go to the desert during these weeks of Lent.

I have a friend who spent two weeks on a spiritual retreat. He was at a place in his life where he was feeling burned out, depleted, and needed a change. He contacted a spiritual director, something that he had never done before, and his spiritual director arranged this retreat.

My friend went to a remote area, lived in a trailer with no TV, no telephone, and no human contact except his spiritual director who came to see him once a day, and spent the two weeks alone with God. He says that he nearly went crazy, but it

was one of the spiritual turning points in his life.

Most of us will not have that privilege for these forty days. If we can't go to the desert or even to rural west Tennessee, what can we do in this season of Lent that can help anchor our spiritual lives in the midst of a culture that is soul depleting? I want to suggest this morning that Moses knows.

Our Lenten journey starts in the desert with the children of Israel. The children of Israel were about to cross into the Promised Land. For the first time in their lives, they will experience blessings, prosperity, and abundance. They have no idea of what that even means. But Moses knows. Moses knows that with blessing comes the potential for danger. Moses knows that with prosperity there is possibility of curse. Moses knows that with abundance there is the struggle to hold on to your soul. Moses knows that when they get into the land and have good jobs, fine homes, full pantries, overstuffed closets, investment portfolios, money market accounts, new cars, iPods, cell phones, and wireless computers so that they never have to be out of reach or disconnected from the office, they will forget God. Moses knows.

And we know it too. There are members of every church who are faithful, faithful, but struggling with life. After lots of prayer and hard work, they get a better job that requires them to travel, or they get a promotion that gives them more responsibility, or they get a retail shop that requires them to stay open on Sunday, and before long, they are spiritual dropouts. What happened?

In the parable of the Sower and the

Seeds, Jesus warned that the Word of God is easily stifled, smothered, and finally strangled by the "cares, riches, and pleasures of life."

How do we stay connected to our spiritual center when we live so much of our life in the material world? How do we keep a seamless connection between our lives in the workplace and in the sanctuary? How do we live with the same integrity on Monday morning that we had on Sunday morning? How do we keep from becoming attached to and eventually possessed by our possessions and our careers? Moses knows.

"When you have come into the land that your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it, and settle in it. . . ." My guess is that as Moses was preaching these words, the people were already daydreaming, already imagining, already fantasizing about what it would be like. They were so close, they could see it in their minds.

"You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground. . . .you shall put it in a basket. . . .you shall go to the priest . . . .you shall make this response before the LORD your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor' . . . .You shall set it down and bow before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate." Moses knows.

Moses knows exactly what they need to do, how they need to do it, and what they need to say when they do it. Moses knows that worship is a spiritual and emotional anchor that keeps us grounded to spiritual reality in the midst of a secular world.

"You shall take some of the first of all