

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

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October 12, 2025

Pentecost 18

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Once you have entered the land that [Adonai], your God, is giving to you as your inheritance, and you have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land that [Adonai], your God, is giving to you, and put them in a basket. Take them to the place which [Adonai], your God, will choose as a dwelling place for God's Name and say to the priest in office at that time, "This day I declare to [Adonai], our God, that I have come to the land [Adonai] swore to our ancestors to give us." The priest will then receive the basket from you and will set it in front of the altar of [Adonai]. Then you will declare before [Adonai], "My ancestor was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. There they became a nation great, strong and numerous. When the Egyptians mistreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labour upon us, we cried to [Adonai], the God of our ancestors, who heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. [Adonai] brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; [Adonai] gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have brought now the first fruits of the products of the soil that you, O God, have given me." Then you must set them before [Adonai] and bow down before [Adonai]. Then you all, along with the Levites, and the foreigner that live among you, will feast on all the good things that [Adonai], your God, has given to you and your household.

John 6:25-35

When they found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them, "The truth of the matter is, you're not looking for me because you've seen signs, but because you've eaten your fill of the bread. You shouldn't be working for perishable food, but for life-giving food that lasts for all eternity; this the Chosen One can give you, for the Chosen One bears the seal of Abba God." At this they said, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God: to believe in the one whom God has sent." So they asked Jesus, "What sign are you going to give to show us that we should believe in you? What will you do? Our ancestors had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says, 'God gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "The truth of the matter is, Moses hasn't given you bread from heaven; yet my Abba gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Teacher," they said, "give us this bread from now on." Jesus explained to them, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry; no one who believes in me will be thirsty."

Thanksgiving weekend. It's a time when we're all encouraged to make some effort to think about that in which our lives are sources of gratitude. There are some things to be grateful for this weekend.

- We are in the midst of a ceasefire in Gaza. The Israeli Defense Forces have pulled back behind their self-determined yellow line. Hostages are being arranged for repatriation.
- The Nobel Prize for Peace went to an opposition leader who working from the shadows, from hiding, is seeking to advance democratic principles in the midst of dictatorship.
- My son Ben is out of hospital. And there's more clarity on what his ongoing health issues are and how that might affect him going forward. There's even talk of a new wedding date being set before the end of the year. I've learned not to look too far into the future, and that's actually a gift for which I'm grateful.

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The book of Deuteronomy is essentially the legal code of the Hebrew kingdom of Judah. It likely found its written form sometime maybe late 8th century, early 7th century before Jesus' time. Now, it's presented in a literary form as laws within a larger narrative. It's written as if it is the law being presented to the former Egyptian slaves who have journeyed through the wilderness with Moses for 40 years. Many of them new to the community who had no firsthand experience or memory of Egypt. They finally arrived at the river's edge. They took the long way to Canaan from Egypt. If you think of a modern map, they went from the Nile River and then they crossed the Sinai Peninsula and they came up what would be through modern Jordan and have arrived at the Jordan River ready to go into the land of Canaan from the east. So, they're on the river's edge. They can see this land that their ancestors spoke about that they'd already developed as a legendary land of promise. It'll be flowing with milk and honey.

The story went... Moses is elderly at this point and he's near death actually. Deuteronomy is written from Moses' perspective. Moses is able to see that they've arrived. And then with his final breaths, Moses says, "Before you cross that river, before you make your way into this promised land, let me give you some advice on how to live there."

One of the last instructions is the harvest offering. From the first fruits of the beginning of your seasonal harvest, bring a portion of those first fruits. When you've just started to bring the crops in, pool those with other growers. Come to a central place. Come to where you gather for national worship. Come to where the priests hold the faith on your behalf and be grateful. Place your gifts before the altar of God and celebrate with each other. Feast with each other on that which has been given. And make sure that your feast not only includes those who grew the crops and their families, but include the Levites, include the priests, include the foreigners, the migrants, the refugees, the aliens within your midst who have no land of their own from which to produce. Bring some of your first fruits. Act out of gratitude at the beginning of the harvest. You don't even know what the full harvest will be yet, but from the first of the fruits, bring those and offer this physical offering.

The celebration party that happened afterward was not the only part of the story. They're also to remember how they got there. Tell the story from the time that Abraham left with his father and his cousin. Have them go. Tell the story of how they journeyed into the land of Canaan. They wandered there were the aliens in that land, settled, grew their family, and then tell the story how a worldwide famine forced them to move to Egypt. Maybe you'll even tell the story of their family connection in Egypt, a long lost son, and how they lived good lives in Egypt and they were welcomed there even though they were foreigners, refugees, migrants because of economy, because of hunger. And remember how they grew into a great and mighty family in Egypt that became an identifiable people. So identifiable they said, "We are the children of Abraham's grandson. We are Jacob's people." Jacob's nickname was the wrestler with God. We are the God wrestler's people. We are *Israel*. Then tell how they were a threat to power. That this migrant community that had its own identity was a threat to those who were in charge of bigger things in that economy, bigger things in that politic. And they were seen as the other... forced into servitude. Lives where they would not control what they grew. Lives where they were always under the thumb of someone else. And remember to tell the story that they did not forget who they were, that they remained grateful to be the ancestors of Jacob and Isaac and Abraham. Tell the story that God did not abandon them in Egypt. That God heard their cry, led them across a sea of reeds, provided for them in a harsh wilderness, and brought them to the edge of a river leading to a land of promise, bringing full circle to the story of Abraham. Be grateful not only for what is here today, but for all that became part of the reason why we're at today, the good and the bad.

An Alberta harvest update from a city boy who had does have internet access. Apparently, in most parts of the

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province, the harvest is ahead of schedule. We've had some dry conditions and that's helped. So, maybe we're thankful. Those dry conditions, of course, will mean there's not a lot of moisture in the soil to start off the winter. It's not going to be great for any grazing lands or pasture fields. It's been a decent summer as far as growing goes. So, the yields from those fields are higher than average, which is something to be thankful for. Of course, tariffs and glutted world markets mean that the price per bushel is probably not as high. So, are we thankful for this harvest? Because it's fast and good quantity and quality or are we a little cautious because the dry conditions don't bode well for the winter or the spring and there may not be the realization of the income from the field.

It was true before Jesus' time. It was true during Jesus' time. It was true after Jesus' time that the success of any growing operation whether it's small or large is always improved by the knowledge and the skills of the farmers and the quality of the seeds from year to year. But there's so much that the farmer doesn't control. Don't control the weather. Don't control the soil moisture or quality. Don't control the nitrogen content. Don't control which insects will be plentiful that year and whether they like your crop. Don't control what diseases might afflict the fields. All part of the natural world that is beyond our control. People of faith will say, "Well, it's God and maybe God can improve the weather." And so we try to control that which we can't through prayer. Many cultures have rituals that relate to raining when it need rain or warmth when we need warmth.

The grower also doesn't control if there is going to be a market for the surplus? That was also true in Jesus' day because there were many people who needed the fruits of the field who didn't have fields themselves. And so there was always a market for the surplus. Modern world markets always seem to move in the opposite direction to the field yields, don't they? The more you produce, the cheaper you can sell it for. When prices are high, you have little to sell. When prices are low, you have silos full. It's challenging to be grateful when not everything is positive.

The passage we read from Luke today is a followup to the story that is often called the feeding of the 5000. That the feeding story is told a few different times in our gospel narratives. Sometimes it's a feeding of 5,000. Sometimes it's a feeding of 4,000. Sometimes it's a multitude. 5,000 might even be an underestimate because there's one account that said it was 5,000 men plus women and children. So what's that make it? 15,000 20,000?

A large crowd gathered to hear Jesus speak and teach and inspire, to offer healing and renewal and acceptance. And it's time for people to eat. The suggestion was, why don't we disperse the crowd so they can go home and eat? But it was important for them to stay together. The disciples had not planned on offering a meal; they didn't have food for everyone. One boy came up and said, "Well, I've got five loaves of bread and two fish." Jesus had them sit down and they take the boy's food and they start passing baskets around and there's enough for everyone to eat. It catches people's attention. Not be just because they were able to eat the protein from the fish and the and the grain from the bread, but also this murmur through the crowd of where it all came from.

Eventually Jesus leaves that place and gets back in his boat and sails along the seashore to another community which is where our reading picks up the narrative. And so Jesus travels across the lake or down the lake. And what also travels is the story of what happened with the feeding of a multitude. There was this huge bounty. And the people come and say, "Jesus, we didn't know you were here. We just heard what happened in the neighboring village. We want that." Some of them might even have been from that place and said, "We want more." And Jesus says, "Well, I think you missed the point. I mean, yes, it was about having a meal. But no one was starving. It was just the evening meal.

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Still, it was a miracle. We don't know how that miracle happened. Was it food out of thin air? Was it the example of the little boy who had five loaves of fish, five loaves of bread, and two fish, more than he needed? He was sharing his extra. Did that inspire others to take what they'd brought and share their extra and that's how we had enough for everyone? The story doesn't tell us how it happened. Just tells us **that** it happened and that something miraculous was going on. It was at least as much about offering what was there as well as receiving it. And Jesus thinks this new crowd in this new town on this new shoreline are missing that point. Because Jesus' underlying parallel message made it clear to this new crowd, it's not just about feeding our bodies. It's about feeding our spirits.

We need to be grateful when we feed our spirits. The spirit is not fed by saying, "I'm grateful." The spirit is fed by **living**, "I'm grateful." Jesus said, "Know that you're grateful and let that make a difference in who you are in this world." Being grateful becomes real when one does gratitude. And that's true in times of excess or times of want. It can be true in life right now, no matter what's going on.

Like I said, Ben's illness has brought me down in my mood, and it's challenging me to both widen and simplify my approach to gratitude. I'm grateful for how challenge moves me to see the different pockets of wonder in the moment, even if it's in the midst of a struggling moment. When I see on the news thousands of Gazans walking along the lake shore heading home, a home that they know is utterly destroyed. Rubble cities. It's both sad and hopeful. It's both worrisome and joyful. And like the rest of the world, I'm hoping that tomorrow goes as planned and that the guns and the bombs will stay holstered for a while.

Personally, I'm re-evaluating my own priorities. I'm re-examining what bothers me. I'm doing my best to let go of some grievances that I hold. I'm grabbing on to life inspiring opportunities. And unlike Moses, I think I'm young enough, hopefully, maybe even healthy enough, to move forward, to cross the river that's before me and enter a promise of future opportunities and to know the thanksgiving in each moment along the way.

And I'm going to breathe. Choir, you know all about breath control, right? Can you sing the next line if you don't breathe? No, it's all about knowing when to breathe, what to take in, and what to let out.

And so, I'll speak with gratitude, but more so I will live as a grateful person as best I can who does what he can to allow others to know their own gratitude. I'm going to ensure that thankfulness is not tied to bounty. I'm going to be thankful even in dry times, especially in dry times. Especially in, even in sad times and worried times.

Now, if the ancient Hebrews read Deuteronomy 26 the way that I understand it... even in years of very low yields, they would bring some of the meager first fruits and tell the old story because it's the first part of the harvest. They don't wait till the end and see, did we make enough this year? When we start, we're going to bring some of that first start. If it's a small first start, we'll bring a smaller part. *And they're going to tell the old story. My ancestor wandered into this land and found a home. And his descendants wandered into a land and found a home. And they wandered through a wilderness and found a home.*

Let's be grateful because we are part of a long and varied story this weekend and beyond. May we live in simple and deep gratitude for what is offered today.

Let's pray.

Thank you, God. Amen.

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Hymn: 194MV Bread of Life

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