

Deuteronomy 10:12-22  
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 23, 2022

People may take time to ponder their purpose. "Why am I here?" they ask as they look for direction in life or are faced with choices. Sometimes that question becomes, "Why am I still here?" as we grow older. Regardless of our age, we have the same purpose. We see it reflected in the words of Moses in today's text.

SERVE THE LORD YOUR GOD

- I. He provides the motive
- II. He sets the example
- III. He outlines the manner

Motivation produces action but when it comes to serving the Lord, it must be the correct one. We don't do right in God's sight as a bargaining chip, as if to say, "You owe me, Lord. Look what I have done." He is indebted to no one. Another way we try to claim credit is to point to somebody else, claiming, "At least I'm better than he is."

Many try to win God's favor and earn heaven. That doesn't work, as the man in today's Gospel learned. Actually, trying to do so displeases the Lord as it falls far short of the perfection required and rejects what he has provided in Jesus.

Moses identified the correct motive for serving the Lord. We are responding to his love and grace. That marvelous, undeserved love was evident in his choosing the nation of Israel to be his own. Moses noted the God needed nothing more; he had it all—he made it and he owns it. But he selected that one nation to be his own. From the whole world he picked them. "The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today." That choice was not based on merit. They hadn't even been a nation so hadn't done anything to deserve it. And when they did exist, they weren't good. They often proved to be rebellious and sinful. Moses reminded them of some instances in the previous chapter. When gathered at Mt. Sinai to receive the commandments, which they had promised to obey, they formed the golden calf and started worshiping it just because Moses hadn't returned from being up on the mountain for forty days. Only after his fervent intercession had they averted destruction. The first time they neared entrance to the Promised Land they sent spies to check things out and decided not to go in because they were afraid of the people already in the land. So God had them wander in the desert for

the next forty years. They were constantly grumbling about the provisions and the leadership God provided. Clearly anything he did for them was an act of grace.

If that wasn't enough reason to serve him, Moses noted more blessings. "He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes." We can recount several. There was the crossing of the Red Sea when the waters divided to allow the Israelites to escape and then closed to destroy the pursuing army of Egypt. The Lord sent manna to feed the nation and supplied drinkable water when needed. He gave them military victories along the way, even though they weren't a fighting force. Early on they prevailed in a battle as long as Moses held his hands high. More recently they had defeated opposition east of the Jordan River. There was the time he cured many of snakebite (a consequence of another round of complaining) by having Moses form a snake of bronze and put it on a pole for them to look to with trust that he would so bless them. In the last verse of the text he pointed to their increase in population as further evidence of God's faithfulness to his promises. He also assured them of victories to come as they entered the land. Then there was that greater promise that was just as sure, the promise of the Savior. That was why they existed as a nation, for it was through them that God's Son would come to rescue the world from sin by his perfect life and innocent death. Could there be any more powerful motive for service?

The words before us were spoken long ago but they are not just history. We Christians are God's chosen people now, the recipients of great blessings. He determined in eternity to call us to faith. That was totally an act of grace and not because of any superior quality. We did not exist so had done nothing to merit his choice. Nor was it in view of great things to come. An honest look at our lives supports that statement. We are guilty of recurring unfaithfulness and sin. Our hearts place other things higher in value than the Lord. He and his Word can come later as there will be plenty more opportunities to give them attention, or so we think. This or that activity is more urgent. We have not kept our minds pure. Unclean thoughts and filthy language are common. Love for others is often lacking as we are wrapped up in our own world and miss the emotional, spiritual and physical needs that surround us. We overlook that people can be starving, dying of a broken heart or dying without knowing Jesus as their Savior. Despite our unworthiness God chose us and brought us to faith and has showered his goodness on us. He has forgiven all our sins, no matter what we are guilty of, filled us with peace, promised us heaven eternally and daily care in this life. We have compelling reason to sing his praise and to respond to his goodness by serving him.

## II.

Being motivated, we also need to know how to serve the Lord. If you have tried a new skill or sport you know that a good way to learn is to have someone show you how. So here God sets the example personally. There is no one like him. He is "God of gods and Lord of lords." He is supreme over all, "mighty and awesome." He is perfect and holy in all his ways.

Moses highlighted that God is impartial. Literally it says he does not lift up someone's face to see who it is and play favorites in pouring out his blessings. He cares for all his creatures, the lowly sparrow, each insect and animal. He sends his rain to water the crops of both believers and unbelievers. He sent his Son to redeem the entire world.

He also "accepts no bribes." I suppose because he already owns everything there is nothing one could give him to sway his opinion. You can't buy your way into heaven. He is just so keeps his word. That means he punishes evil, which sounds a warning for all of us. As mention of justice strikes fear into us as sinners, it also means he doesn't exact double punishment. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins so we will not suffer a second time.

When it comes to actions toward others his example encourages us. "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing." The helpless and neglected are objects of his concern. He is a God of hospitality, receiving all who come to him and furnishing their needs. Think of the seven years of famine in Egypt that Joseph foretold in interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh. The family of Jacob, along with many others benefited from the food stored during the years of plenty.

We follow the example of our Lord. Imitate his manner of justice, charity and hospitality. Share material assistance and friendship with the world, with everyone. Look beyond your close circle of acquaintances. Reach out in love. John reminds us in his First Epistle, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" Our concern includes sharing the love of God in Jesus. We do so gladly as we respond to the love we have already received in his Son and we follow his example with thankful hearts.

## III.

Setting examples are good. We remind parents, teachers, coaches and other leaders that many lessons are caught rather than taught. But we may need to spell out the lesson given. Deeds can be misconstrued. There was a believer who

thought actions of Christlike love were enough; he didn't need to verbalize his faith. A fellow worker approached him with a question: "I can tell there's something different about you, in the way you act and handle life." The Christian glowed inwardly as he thought his method worked, until the other continued, "You must be one of those vegetarians." So as we learn service from God he outlines the manner. Attitude is important. "And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." We fear God. We are not scared of him because of our sins. This fear is respect or reverence. We stand in awe of him. We recognize his power but we also know his mercy and grace. The attitude can be compared with that of a child toward his or her parents.

We love God. We hold him as our dearest treasure. We cling to him in faith. We know he is the most important part of our existence. He has no rivals in our heart. It is a total commitment that God calls for. He said 100 per cent, all our heart and all our soul. There is to be no half-heartedness, no straddling the fence or dividing our time with the things of this world as the Second Lesson warned. We cannot serve two masters. God is and deserves to be number one.

That attitude is a change. Moses directed, "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." Physical circumcision was a sign of the covenant for the Israelite men and boys, but it was not to be just an outward act. Note that he said to circumcise their hearts. Throw off the sinful flesh by repenting of your sins and believing. A parallel thought was to not be stiff-necked. A stiff neck prevents bowing in humility and repentance. Hearts become hard and calloused by continued sinning and indifference to God's commands. The problem shows in apathy to God's Word and worship. There may be a lack of excitement for the gospel message or little interest in spreading it, for living as a witness to our Savior or turning to his Word for guidance or for strength to resist temptation.

Love for God takes action. An earthly ruler would not count as a patriot one who was constantly leading rebellions. Loyalty and love for God is visible as we serve and obey him. That's what the text was getting at when it said to take your oaths in his name. Show by your daily life where your heart is. Take a public stand for the Lord. Our actions and reactions show lots about what's inside, some that we might prefer others not know. What does your lifestyle show allegiance to?

We are to serve the Lord and to walk in his ways. His law guides us "to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good." There is wisdom in those ways. The world benefits when they are followed. The Israelites had many regulations for their worship and society that were intended

only for them, to set them apart as his special people, but there were also moral principles that the Ten Commandments contain. We use them still to show us the paths of right. They call for us to love God and our neighbor.

Moses was reviewing God's law as he addressed a new generation at the end of the forty years of wandering. Before they entered their new land and spread out, he gave this final address to remind them of God's will for their lives.

We use it also, even though Christ kept the law for us and ended its control. We need it for our Old Adam, as a curb to rein in rebellion and disobedience, and as a mirror to reveal our sin and need for repentance. For the Christian it is also a guide of what God ways about right and wrong, so we know what pleases him as we offer our service to his glory.

What will you do with the instruction of Moses? Many Israelites didn't heed it. They pursued idolatry. They relied on their heritage instead of circumcising their hearts in repenting and believing. They rejected the Savior when he came into the world.

Hear and heed that lesson from the past. Repent of your sins and believe in Jesus as your Savior. Know the blessings he has brought: forgiveness for all your sins and eternal life. Knowing how he loved you and served your needs, love and serve him with your whole heart. Live each day in praise to him.