

Our Motto

Deut 26:1-11 Thanksgiving

Pastor Bill Mosley

In the War of 1812, British forces captured Washington, DC and burned the capitol. They took a prisoner named William Beanes. In September of 1814, a Washington lawyer boarded the British prison ship in Baltimore harbor. **He was sent by President Madison to secure the release of William Beanes.** A problem arose when the British chose to begin a battle for the city of Baltimore. The American negotiators were not allowed to leave the prison ship. While they watched, For 25 hours on Sept 13-14, 1814 the British fleet shelled Fort McHenry on the Baltimore harbor.

A giant flag flew over Fort McHenry. In that flag, the lawyer saw the blood being shed, and the ideals of liberty and justice behind it. On the prison ship during the battle that lawyer made an act of worship.

He wrote a poem with four verses. The first verse you probably know. The second and third are about the War. **But the fourth verse is a hymn. The fourth verse is a hymn of thanks and praise and a reminder of where the victory, the peace, indeed all gifts come from.**

Oh, thus be it ever when free men shall stand
Between their loved homes And the war's desolation.
Blest with victory & peace, May the Heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that has made And preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just
And this be our motto: **"In God is our trust."**
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free And the home of the brave.

Most people think the National Anthem of the United States of America is just the 1st verse. **But wouldn't we do better if we began to sing the last verse more often than the first, & make our theme the praise & trust of God? & make it an act of worship?**

And don't we need this reminder? Don't we forget in our daily routine, how we got this country, what it takes to keep this country free and affluent and moral, and where the strength and power come from to do all this? People kneel in protest, & complain about how hard life is and how little we have, but our motto still is "In God we trust." And that's right on the money. :-)

We aren't alone in our ingratitude. About 1300 or so years before Christ, the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt. God sent them a deliverer, Moses, the prince of Egypt. 40 years later "they have fled their slavery in Egypt and trekked through a dry and dusty wilderness filled with snakes and scorpions and burning heat. But finally their next generation has reached the eastern bank of the Jordan River, and they are...looking over into the land of Palestine. Before they cross the Jordan River, Moses addresses them in 3 long sermons. [Tonight's reading is from the 1st sermon.] His theme? **Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. (v. 11)**

"The Lord led Israel for over forty years after her release from Egyptian slavery. He brought her out of the house of bondage and guided her through the wilderness by pillar [of cloud] by day and fire by night. He quenched her thirst with water from a rock and gave her daily bread from the manna. ...gracious actions [of a loving God] toward his chosen people whom he loved... **They complained all through the forty years.**

But despite their rebellion & obstinacy & repeated sin against him, God brought his beloved people to the edge of the land he had promised them." Elizabeth Achtemeier, EMPHASIS,

Moses says Don't forget. Make an offering as a reminder that you don't live just to yourself alone, but to God.

Some people believe in a god who is only interested in ending things.

Don't we have a God who has shown us that He is more interested in starting things? Again and again, God starts over. Have we forgotten? After the sin in the Garden of Eden. After the flood with Noah and his family. After the tower of Babel. After Abraham and Sarah are beyond childbearing age. After Israel sells Joseph into slavery in Egypt. After freeing the enslaved nation. After conquering the promised land. After the Babylonian Exile. **Even after the Son of God is rejected, tortured & killed on a cross. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God starts new, sending his Holy Spirit to give birth to a church that started with twelve ordinary people, and from that birth has lasted 2000 years.**

Jesus comes to us new every day -- we have his promise in our baptism. We have what the Saints before us had, what John of Patmos had, what the thief on the cross had. We have the assurance of Jesus that he is with us always, in every age.

We just need something to remind us of it, like a motto.

As Francis Scott Key looked across the harbor he saw that flag that had been through battle and was still there. And he thought of a God who had made and preserved us a nation, in whom, even in the face of battle, was our trust. Because he is a God of new beginnings. It was a reminder, as Thanksgiving Day is supposed to be a reminder for us. A motto.

This Thanksgiving, there will be turkey, reminding us that there are hungry people out there, & we are blessed to be able to share with them.

This Thanksgiving there will be gridiron battles, let them remind us that there were other kinds of battles fought to win our freedom and to preserve our land.

This Thanksgiving there will be parades and traveling, less than normal, and with masks and social distancing, but let them remind us of the travelling of Israel to the Promised Land.

And in all of these there is the reminder of the grace and love and generosity of a God who is fond of new beginnings. In him we trust; that is our motto. We can begin again, even after a terrible tragedy ruins a school, even after a gunman ravages a worshiping congregation.

This Thanksgiving, in the midst of the holiday partying, the feasting, the football, the travelling and the parades, take some time to make a new beginning of your own, to remind you of the God of new beginnings who has blessed you.

Do something new. Start something new. Meet someone new. Read a new book of the Bible you've never read before. Write a thank-you to someone you've never thanked. Take a class to learn a new skill. Give more than you've ever given to a program for feeding the poor. Give to a charity you've never supported before. Learn a new hymn or song of praise to God.

Maybe even memorize the fourth verse of the Star-Spangled Banner.

But do something new to thank the God of new beginnings.

Lord, Fill us with a Spirit of gratitude for new beginnings, that we may say no to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.