

Deuteronomy 26:1-11/Luke 4:1-13

In Deuteronomy 26:1ff God is speaking to the Israelites, **“When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and have taken possession of it, and live in it, you shall take some of the first fruits to the house of the Lord...”**

The background of this narrative is in **Genesis 12:1ff**, the calling of Abraham, **“Go from your country and your people and your father’s house to the land I will show you”**.

Then verse **7 of Genesis 12** says, **“I will give this land to your seed”**. So, Abraham was shown and promised the land, but he never lived on it, but his seed/descendants were to inhabit the land. But who were those descendants? **Deuteronomy 1:1** gives us a clue, these are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel beyond in the wilderness, **“Behold, I have set the land before you, go in and possess the land which God swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”**. So, the land was promised to Abraham, but the Israelites were the beneficiaries.

Now, the passage we read this morning from **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**, remind the Israelites that at one point in history, their forefathers were wandering Arameans. This passage also gives the Israelites instructions on how to survive in the promised land. One clear requirement was that they were supposed to take the first fruits to the house of the Lord. This became a precursor for the New Testament feast of the Weeks which later translated into the Pentecost.

This background will enable us to realize that it was not the conquest in Joshua that gave Israel a homeland, but God. For the Israelites, offering of the first fruits was an acknowledgement that everything belongs to God. What motivated all Israelite generations to give was the continuous remembrance that although they were landlords

in Canaan, at one point in history, their forefathers were wandering Arameans-people of no fixed abode. This they believed to the extent that every time they brought their offerings to the Lord, they would in their hearts recite, **“A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down to Egypt and lived there, few of us, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our forefathers, and the Lord heard our voices, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression, and He brought us out of Egypt...”**

But what was the link between Israel and the Arameans? Their relationship goes back to the beginning of Israelite nation. The Aramean people were Semitic people who occupied greater portions of Syria and Mesopotamia. The Bible tells us that Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees and Haran, and these were Mesopotamian cities so originally Abraham was an Aramean. **Genesis 24:4ff**, Abraham's son Isaac decided to marry, and his father sent servants to his country to look for a wife suitable for the young man Isaac. The servants went and returned with Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and sister to Laban. Bethuel and Laban were from Paddan-aram, an Aramean city. **Genesis 31:20ff**, Isaac had a son, Jacob. When Jacob decided to marry, he went secretly to Paddan-aram and married Leah and Rachael, daughters of Laban, an Aramean.

This history proves clearly that even Abraham, the father of faith had pagan roots. So, abandoning that pagan orientation and becoming a pious believer in one God cannot be explained in human terms but can only be attributed to the amazing grace of God. At one point in history, Abraham was identified with the wandering Arameans and Israelites generations after generations kept reminding each other that we need to thank God

because we are living a descent life, we are landlords but at one point in history our forefathers were wandering Arameans.

This background determined how the Israelites gave to their God. Lent being a period of deep introspection we are called to reflect on how God has been gracious to us in our lives, and this may impact positively to the way we give to God. We do not give just for the sack of giving, prayerful giving changes lives. Some of us might have been privileged not to be wandering Arameans” at any stage of our lives but I want to believe that at some point in history our forefathers were wandering Arameans so we should thank God for what we are today.

If we deeply reflect on what God had done for us, and what is doing for us, I assure you that our giving will positively change this lent and onwards. Our forefathers were wandering Arameans, people of no fixed aboard, but not only them, we still have “wandering Arameans” in the streets of Winnipeg today, people without shelter, but we are worshipping at the comfort of our homes. It is my prayer that God refresh our minds this lent so that we reflect deeply on the goodness of a God to our lives, and in this we will find every reason to bring our gifts to the house of the Lord. **Amen.**