

## First Fruits

### *Deuteronomy 26:1-11*

*When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us."*

*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 before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." 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 with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.*

We aren't an agrarian people. Far from it. We no longer (if we ever did) bring baskets of first fruits and place them before the clergy who function in the priestly offices of First United Church. We deal in commerce, converting our work into cash which we use in exchange for someone else's "first fruits." Cash is nice; it's portable, it's convenient, it's accessible. But it also has a tendency to make us forget "who we are and to whom we belong."

You see, it's nothing to bring an offering and drop it in the plate and forget the why of the gift. Ancient Israel, in setting forth its worship practices, placed their confession after the offering. They did so in order to remember the "why" of the gift. They remembered their ancestor's nomadic existence. They remembered their afflictions at the hands of power mis-used. They remembered their deliverance. They remembered the gift: a land to call their own; a land flowing with milk and honey. It's not easy to remember that when your landscape is brick and mortar and concrete and glass. It's not easy to remember God in the city. It's not easy to think of God as the source of all we are, all we have, all we were, and all we will be. It's much easier to imagine that what we have, we have gotten on our own.

But it is well for us from time to time to remember the great good gifts that God gives. It allows us to get our priorities in order and to thank the One responsible for our all of our lives.

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