

Text: Deuteronomy 26, 4-10; Luke 4:1–13
First Sunday of Lent, Year C
10 March 2019
© Rev. Paul R Pluth, JCL

For 40 years the Jews have been crossing the Sinai desert, headed back home from Egypt to the Israel, led by Moses whom God chose to free the Jews from slavery. Now the Jews are at the border, about to cross the Jordan River into Israel, and Moses is about to die in sight of the Promised Homeland. Moses gives this final instructions, repeated in our First Reading: “When the priest takes the basket of the land’s first produce from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, make this response: ‘My father was a wandering Aramean.’”

“My father was a wandering Aramean.” With those words the Jews remember how their ancestor Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was called by God from Aramea in northern Syria and led to the land that would become Israel. They remember how the Lord promised Abraham that his and Sarah’s descendents would become more numerous than the stars, at a time when Abraham and Sarah were past the age of having children. The Jews remember how God rescued them from death by famine, by providing a refuge for them in Egypt—and then when they became slaves in Egypt, the Lord led them out of the certain death that was theirs if they stayed in Egypt, and brought them through the waters of the Red Sea back into the land he had promised to them, the land of milk and honey, Israel. And now, back in Israel, they bring to the altar of the Lord their offering of the first crops of their homeland - not the extras, not the last food of the season, but the *first* fruits, and offering of the first things they have been able to grow in, to show that they trust God will continue to provide more for them, as he has in the past beginning with that earliest memory: “My father was a wandering Aramean.”

In Lent, we Christians do the same thing: we go over the high points of our history as God’s people. Lent is like a Netflix miniseries. Every Sunday in Lent, in these First Readings from the Old Testament, we are going to hear another episode of what God was doing for our ancestors in faith, the Jews, until we arrive at the night before Easter. That night, at the Easter Vigil, we will tell the Old Testament stories of how God rescued us time after time. Then, at the last, we will remember the greatest story, the story of God rescuing *the world* by raising Jesus from the dead. And we will raise the plate of bread and the cup of wine, now become the body and blood of the Risen Jesus Christ, doing what Jesus told us, ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ just as the Jews placed their gifts on the altar remembering, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean.’

In the Gospel we heard how Jesus, after he was baptized, spent 40 days fasting in the quiet space of the desert, getting ready to do battle with the Devil *after* the 40 days were over. That's what we baptized Christians are doing now during the 40 days of Lent. We are building up our spiritual strength in order to be able, come Easter Day, to renew the promises made at our Baptism, and with Jesus take up the battle against the Devil with purified hearts and minds.