

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, September 21, 2025

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Before we read it together, before we hear it read and then proclaimed, I invite you to take a couple deep breaths with me. So, take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Take another deep breath in. Breathe it out slowly. Breathe in God's mercies, and breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies, and breathe out God's mercies to others. Let us pray together.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. We pray that you would attend to our hearts and our minds in this time. That you would quiet within us any voice but your own. That we might hear your word for us this day, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

This is Deuteronomy 6: verses 10-14.

*When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, a land with fine flourishing cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. The Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the people who are all around you.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, I love this scripture for a number of reasons, but I love it most because it sets me in three postures all at once. The posture of humility, the posture of gratitude, and the posture of hope. The first posture, humility. This is going to be an easier sermon to follow than some. Actually, we got one, two, three, then we'll wrap it up. Okay. The first posture, humility. Okay, particularly for me, it's humility before institutions. Let me say a word about that. I was first introduced to this text when I was a summer intern at Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church in the old village of Mount Pleasant. If you take a bridge across from Charleston going northward, you will land on Mount Pleasant. It was an old fishing village. There's a Presbyterian church in the old village there that's been around for a couple hundred years. I had the opportunity over my first summer after my first year in seminary to be an intern there. And it was an amazing experience to be a part of a church family that had been together for such a long period of time, who cared about each other, who loved each other. I got to do young adult ministry there. So, we started a theology on tap and a Bible study as well. And it was just amazing. Every day I would leave from my office at Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church and I would walk through the sanctuary

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and out the front doors and onto Pit Street. I'd walk down Pit Street about a quarter of a mile and there I'd stop in Pit Street Pharmacy. Almost every single day for an entire summer, I sat at the counter, and I ordered the same thing. I got a pimento cheese on toasted white and a chicken salad sandwich on toasted wheat. They were tiny sandwiches and I was a growing boy. And a bag of chips and a cookie. And depending on what the particular flavor was for that day, I either got a cherry Coke or a vanilla Coke. And this was an old school pharmacy, right? So they're... they're pumping the vanilla or the cherry into the Coca-Cola. It was delightful. I would walk back to that church after lunch every day, and I found myself humbled to be a part of that community. Humbled that actually I was getting paid to do ministry, right? To go and have a beer with college students and those in their young adult ages and talk about theology and talk about scripture and talk about faith, right? It was...it was pretty amazing. Before I would preach in the sanctuary there, this old sanctuary, I would spend Saturday evenings in there. I'd let myself in. There was no alarm on Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church. And so I'd just take my key. I'd unlock the front door of the sanctuary and walk right in. I'd sit down. I'd turn on all the lights and I'd just sit in humility for all the saints who had gone before me in that place. We actually have a connection, Idlewild does. Some of y'all know this. One of our pastors from not too long ago in the 1990s, Jim Lowry, was a senior pastor at Mount Pleasant before he came here to Idlewild. Right? I didn't know that at the time, but I would sit there, and I would find myself in a posture of humility before all of the saints who had first gathered on that plot of land in that old fishing village and then imagined what it might look like to worship God there and then think we should probably build something here that could house us every week. Maybe give us some reprieve from the hot Charleston summers. Right? There's something about humility that this text introduced to the people of Israel as well. You are going to a place. It says God is taking you to a place. And it's going to be filled with large flourishing cities that you didn't build. Houses filled with all sorts of good things that you did not fill. Hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. And you're going to get to enjoy all of them. the flourishing city, the filled home, the deep well, and all the food you can eat. You did not will these things into existence, but God did. Through a great cloud of witnesses, God authored them in your midst. The author of Deuteronomy wants the people to remain humble when they are brought into this place. I think it's an important posture for us, maybe particularly in this time. The posture of humility. That we get to be inheritors of things that we didn't plant, we didn't build, we haven't grown. I used to go in, as I told you, to the sanctuary at Mount Pleasant late on Saturday night. I don't do it so much here. There's lots of noises in this place when you're by yourself, okay? It just gets a little scary, but I do find myself humbled. A couple of weeks ago, my second family came through town and were with me for a couple of days, and I drove them down Union on Friday night, and the facade of the church and the bell tower were lit. And I thought about all the saints who more than almost 150 years ago, more than 100 years ago,

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gathered in the living room of Davant Latham's grandfather and imagined this place, right? They didn't imagine this place. Actually, there were two other locations not but a couple of blocks from here, right? But we're inheritors of their imagining and of God's work through them.

The first posture this text puts me in is one of humility. The second posture that it puts me in is one of gratitude. It's humility before institutions. It's gratitude for people. Let me say why that is. For a very long time, I thought this text was about a place. It was about a place to which God was taking the people of Israel or maybe even taking us, right? But then I met this fellow, Pastor Joshua, right? And we became dear friends. And then he started working here as one of our parish associates, one of our pastors here. And then he was ordained in this very place, right? And in that in that ordination service, I wrote him a little note and I said, "You know, for the longest time, I've been committed to this passage, imagining it was about a place, but I just figured out, just in the last few days, that this passage is also about people."

See, it turns out that all of us are the result of the people who have poured into us, poured God's love and God's grace. We are the result of coaches and mentors and teachers and parents and friends. We are the result of all of the things that they have poured into us by God's grace. And so when you look at your neighbor, you're not just seeing your neighbor. You're seeing the investment of countless people into who they are. If you admire something about someone sitting close to you in the pew, know that it didn't just come about by happenstance, that there was someone who spent time with them, nurturing them, caring for them, and get this, praying for them, right? We then get to enjoy the fruit of that. And I don't know how else to respond to that but to be grateful. Grateful to God. I think the author of Deuteronomy wants the people of Israel to be grateful for the places and the people into which they are moving.

The author wants them to know that everyone walking beside them on this path towards this place is the result of countless investments by countless people. I've told this story a couple times before, but Georgia and Guy Cloer come to my mind every time I think about those who've invested in me. They were in retirement age when I got to know them, and I was 9 years old. They're still with us, right? And they taught me Sunday school all the way up. They would bring hot and fresh Krispy Kreme donuts, right? And even though our church had almost a thousand members growing up, more often than not, I'd be the singular child in Sunday school class, okay? And they wouldn't just talk about sports or things that I was interested in, they would teach me. They wouldn't do sword drills because I couldn't compete against myself, but they would open the Bible and they would teach me stories of scripture, right? They poured into me for years from the time I was in third grade to the time I graduated high school. Guy and Georgia Cloer were there. I wonder if when I ask you who has poured into you, who's invested in you that's

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made you the the partner, the friend, the disciple that you are. I wonder whose face comes to mind.

I wonder if there's a bunch of faces that come to mind. Saints. I told Joshua in that note that I was so deeply grateful that the Lord revealed this. This text was not about a place. It was about people as well. Because I was so deeply grateful for the people who had poured into him to make him the faithful man that he was and is and will be. So the second posture this text puts me in is one of gratitude.

The final posture, the third posture that this text puts me in, is a posture of hope. We have humility before institutions. We have gratitude for people. And we have hope in God's promise. We have hope in God's promise. I want to reread the beginning of this text. Verse 10. "When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, a land full of large flourishing cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—when you've eaten your fill, be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God."

Now, you've heard it twice. What's the first word of verse 10? When.

This is key for us. This is the way in which I'm put into a posture of hope through this text. The first word of this text is not if, it is when. This is not instruction for something if it happens to happen, right? This isn't a preview. Hey, if the Lord your God brings you into a place, a place you didn't build, a place that is flourishing, filled with all sorts of good stuff, plenty to drink, plenty to eat, if God does that, then do not forget. That is not the posture of this text. It is when. The reason that puts me in a posture of hope is because it reminds me that if I am not yet in a place of flourishing, if I am not yet in a place of goodness, if I am not yet in a place where the living water feels inexhaustible, if I'm not yet in a place where I can be filled, then God is not done.

Because it is not a question of if. It is a question only of when. So if you find yourself this morning not feeling like you are in a place of flourishing, not feeling like you are in a place where you are filled, feeling parched because the well doesn't seem deep enough, if you find yourself in that place, you need to know that God is with you there. And it is not an if that God will draw you from that place. It is a when.

So we have humility before institutions. We have gratitude for people. And we have hope in God's promise. That's the posture that this text puts me in. But posture is only helpful to a certain

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extent. Posture is supposed to prepare us for something else. So I promised you only three. I'm going to give you three more. Okay? You're a captive audience. Three faithful responses. The text gives these to us. It's not my fault. The text gives them to us. Okay.

What does it look like once we've been put into this posture of humility, this posture of gratitude, this posture of hope? What does it look like for us to respond? Our first response is to remember. Verse 12 says, "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Do not forget," or put in a positive way, "remember the Lord." Remember. Just a second ago, we asked you to remember those who had poured into you. I want you to not just think about their faces. I want you to think about the real particular ways in which they have poured into you. The real particular ways that they nurtured you. Maybe they continue to do so. I want you to remember, put back together those memories of how it was they revealed to you the posture of Jesus Christ and how you might live as his disciple.

Verse 13 gives us our second response and that is to serve. 13b says, "Serve the Lord only and take your oaths in the Lord's name." Our response is to serve. Serve the Lord. Here's what I think this posture prepares us for. To really take seriously how we're serving or not serving right now.

And not from a place of guilt or shame. Not at all. But from a place of humility, a place of gratitude, a place of hope. How are you serving God in the world right now? Many of you have full volunteer schedules. Others of you have really full schedules with your family and work engagements. How are you carving out the space to serve the Lord? How can those memories of those people that have come to your mind's eye, when we talk about who has cared for you, who's important to you? How can they propel you into service that is personal to you? Who is it 30 years from now that might be standing up on a chancel or in a pulpit and saying, "I remember who poured into me. I remember that Sunday school teacher, that youth group leader, that one who sat at the table and welcomed us on Wednesday evenings, the one who took special care to pay attention to me when I felt ignored.

I wonder who you're pouring into, how you are serving Christ in that way, and who might a couple decades from now when asked, when prompted by a preacher, might have your face in their mind's eye. Our second response is service.

Our third response, our final response is to reject any other gods. Verse 14 says, "Do not follow other gods. The gods of the people around you." This one...this one feels weighty. This one feels weighty in a different way than the others. It feels weighty because the reality is there are many

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lowercase g gods out in the world calling for our attention, calling for our praise, calling for our fidelity and even our worship.

They have a prominent place not simply on a Sunday morning but all the time, right? And so what does it look like for us to reject, to put aside those things that would compete for our love, compete for our fidelity, compete for our discipleship, to reject the lowercase g gods that are out in the world. And in our rejecting, there's something implicit that we understand as Christians. We are taking up the person and the cross of Jesus Christ. We reject those who would have any other example of love than Christ Jesus. We reject those who would manufacture martyrs in our midst because we know the one who was put to death that all might live for we worship the one and only that is Christ Jesus. We remember, we serve, and we reject. Sometimes that's easy. Sometimes it's incredibly difficult. Sometimes we have to default back to texts that have guided us for years. I appreciate y'all letting me do that this morning. I think my wish for you this week is that you might live with this text a bit. You can do 10 through 12. You can extend it to 14 if you want to, that you might put it somewhere prominent for you. Maybe you just mark it in your Bible and you come to it each morning. Maybe you print it out somewhere at your house, and you place it on your mirror as you're getting ready each morning or each evening getting ready to go to bed. I wonder how this text might work on you. How might in this time this text place you in a posture of humility? How it might place you in a posture of gratitude? How it might place you in a posture of hope? For the Lord knows we need humility. Lord knows we need gratitude. Lord knows we need hope. So my hope for you would be that it might work on you this week. That it might change the posture that you've been carrying for the last couple weeks. That it might reorient you to the living Christ in your life and in the world.

Let's pray together.

Gracious and loving one, we know that it is not a question of if, it is a question of when.

Many of us feel like we are living in the midst of that question right now, wondering when it is you might bring us into flourishing, when it is you might bring us into fulfillment, when it is you might satisfy our deepest hungers and thirsts. And for those of us who find ourselves in that place this morning, gird us with your hope.

For those of us who are in the midst of a season of flourishing, who feel grateful for exactly where you have us, who feel completely satisfied, Lord, give us a heart of service and give us a word of hope to speak. We trust and we believe that the same promise that was made to the people of God in Deuteronomy is the same promise for each of us in Christ Jesus, our Lord, this day. So help us to take the posture that you gift to us and help us to serve you in the world. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ.