

The King of Thanksgiving By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

2 Kings 23: 1-3



Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. 3 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and

decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

All hands on deck! All hands on deck! The kids are coming home. The family is gathering. Stray friends will be in attendance. All hands on deck! Like many of you, we have been getting the house ready for Thanksgiving. Sheets have been changed in the guest rooms. Shelves have been dusted. Floors cleaned. Food prepared. Piles of paper (usually left be me, on the kitchen counters) are being gone through to see what is trash and what is treasure. It's an annual ritual. I never know what I'll find as I go through the stack of receipts, poetry, phone numbers and bills. Sometimes it's just recyclable stuff. Other times I shout, "Eureka! That's where I put it!" I come across a seemingly worthless bit of detritus and find myself caught up in

what is written on it. Perhaps you are more organized than I am. I take some comfort in knowing I am among royalty.

In this morning's lesson from the Bible, King Josiah was doing some house cleaning. The temple had become cluttered with statues, and offerings to pagan deities, and he was trying to sort things out. Josiah was a decent king despite his family of origin. They had allowed all sorts of minor deities to take up residence in the temple (and the palace) and Josiah had a feeling that this was not too good for his kingdom. A bit too diversified, if you will. And so he ordered that the temple be cleaned and repaired. A work crew was hired and although the Bible does not mention this (truly, history does not mention most of this story. There is little archaeological evidence of the facts named in 2Kings 22-23. Nonetheless, the executive director of the MA Bible Society has taught us to read for the "truth" of the story. Imagine into it a bit and listen for God's voice across the ages.

In this case we are told that Josiah has sent his secretary to pay the laborers who have been fixing up the temple. Laborers were not necessarily citizens of the country, but tradespeople who possessed particular skills. Much like the people who mow our lawns, wash our clothes and clean our houses here in Westchester County. They are decent, honest people, trying to make a living by plying their trade. Fortunately for the folks in today's story, Josiah is an honest employer.

I remember when I first heard about [Neighbors Link](#) (the organization we are taking the special offering for this morning) I learned that one of the reasons it got started is because there were people here in Westchester

who would hire immigrants to do their lawn care, clean their house, or build a stone wall, and at the end of a hot and sweaty day deny the workers their pay. These kings and queens of Westchester would take advantage of the laborers status as an immigrant and just dump them back at the train station, tired and penniless. Neighbors Link caught wind of this nefarious practice and decided to become a sort of clearinghouse for hiring immigrants. Neighbors Link provided advocacy and accountability for the people who were enhancing the lives of those who had hired these skilled laborers. Our special offering today will support that kind of program to protect people who are vulnerable. Please give generously...I hear it grows faith!

Back to our story...Josiah sends his secretary to pay the workers (applause) and when he arrives, he finds out that the high priest (who is overseeing the workers) has discovered an old scroll or a book that he thinks the king might want to see.

Now, my guess is (and we can guess a lot in this story) that one of the work crew *actually* found the book. I mean, why would the high priest be sorting through piles of paper when he had hired hands to do that work? It makes more sense to me that one of the workers in the temple came across an official looking book or document and gave it to the high priest. I can imagine one of the people who mows the lawns here at BCC coming to me with something he found in the backyard and saying, "Is this important? It looks important?" Just because I bring it to a church council meeting doesn't mean I found it, right? Unless we discount workers as full people...which we definitely don't do here at BCC. In any event, the book

finds its way to the high priest and he gives it to the secretary. The secretary reads the book and recognizes it as the covenant between the people of Israel and God. It's likely it was the covenant from Deuteronomy 5 that I preached about back in October...the covenant that references the 10 commandments. ([you can read that sermon here](#))

I think it's interesting that the most important covenant in Israel's history has ended up on a shelf in the temple. Kind of lost or forgotten. Note to Luca's family and all of us who entered into covenant with them this morning, keep the covenant alive so that he doesn't have to go looking for it! Remember the promises and the love that we witnessed to earlier this morning and let's keep reminding Luca of that love so that during some Thanksgiving cleaning event in his life he is suddenly presented with the terms of his relationship with God and has to play catch up.

The secretary brings the document/covenant to the King and reads the covenant aloud.

It is an emotional scene as the King realizes that his family has tucked God away among all of the other godlets that had taken up space in the court. Our God was sharing space with gods of fertility, gods of the stars and, gods that required the sacrifice of children!

In Kings 22 we read: **11** *When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. 12 He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and*

Asaiah the king's attendant: 13 "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

Josiah sends his people out to figure out how to right this wrong! He wants to get right with YHWH/God. He consults with prophets and priests and learns that he needs to repent/change if he wants to save his country. Josiah is a decent king and he wants to make amends for the sins of the past...which brings us to today's dramatic reading.

Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. 3 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

Did you catch that? *From the least to the greatest* were gathered, including the unnamed workers who had found the covenant in the first place. These invisible people are now called to be a part of the covenant. They are

integrated into the fabric of the community. They are recognized as participants in the blessings of the Lord. They are integral parts of the reformation that Josiah implements as a decent king.

In our royal duties during this week of Thanksgiving in America, let us pledge ourselves to seeking justice for the least to greatest of God's people.

Let us commit to paying fair wages for work done.

Let us commit to seeking pathways to integration for all people in our communities.

Let us commit to keeping the covenants of our faith alive and active in all of our relationships (especially with little Luca!)

Let us give thanks for the unnamed laborer who changed the course of history in the 7th century, BCE and who brought Israel back into the fold with God.

All hail the King of Thanksgiving...whoever he is!

Amen.