

Lent Devotional March 15, 2025

Scripture

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

18 You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

22 If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

Devotion

Suzanne C. Hager '24

I live in Squirrel Hill, a historically Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Pittsburgh. I live across from a Yeshiva school, and most of my neighbors are Orthodox or Hasidic. So, it came as no surprise to me to see the old outline of a mezuzah on the doorframe of my apartment. I see them all over my building. The mezuzah is typically set to each doorframe of the home. The ancient Israelites would place them on the jams intended for the door, which swings into the threshold of the home.

The mezuzah (מְזוּזָה), meaning “doorpost, doorway, posts, jams,” dates back all the way to the command in Deuteronomy 11 to place the Shema (שמע) prayer on the doorframe. The Shema, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one,” is first mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:4 and later hinted at in 11:13. God is instructing the people on the importance and implications of the Shema and how to grasp it as a commandment.

Commandments are not rules; they are connections to God. They are opportunities to learn and to grow in our faith. Though we Christians do not practice using a mezuzah or practice tefillin (binding the Shema to the head and hands), we are in a baptismal covenant with a God whose commandments allow us to build on our relationship to God. The covenant relationship we have with God allows us to have a lasting relationship. We are given commandments that will help secure our faith and keep our faith communities alive and well. We are to place the words at the center of our hearts and minds (11:18). We are to love God and to walk in God’s ways, holding fast to him (11:22). We are to teach our children the Shema and the other commandments (11:19).

As the church, we affirm and receive these promises from God for our communities today. In a growing secular world, church attendance is declining—especially the Protestant denominations. In teaching the

love of God, we need to show the world God's love through loving our neighbor. If we continue to follow in Christ's likeness, keep the commandments, and teach our children the love of God, the world will see the true meaning of our faith: love.

Prayer

God of all ages, thank you for the teachings you have given us to build up our relationship with you. Teach us to hear ("shema") your words, that we may be formed into Christ's likeness and shine your love to all. Amen.