

When You Have Eaten Your Fill...

Sermon 119 | Greystone Baptist Church | November 7, 2021
Deuteronomy 8:11-20

In today's world, it seems like everything is cause for disagreement. From politics to religion (the classic culprits) to masking or vaxing, traveling or staying put, what clothing one wears or how we do our hair, everybody has opinions about everything. This is not a new predicament, journalists and academics have been studying this for years. In 2016 the Associated Press launched a series called: *Divided America* about which they say: *It's no longer just Republican vs. Democrat, or liberal vs. conservative. It's the 1 percent vs. the 99 percent, rural vs. urban, white men against the world. Climate doubters clash with believers. Bathrooms have become battlefields, borders are battle lines. Sex and race, faith and ethnicity... the melting pot seems to be boiling over...*¹

Despite all of this discord though, there is one thing – or I should say one person – that has found a way to bridge the great divide of the American people. One person who has found her way into all of our hearts, no matter what we think about politics or faith, no matter where we were born or how we were raised... everybody seems to agree on one thing: Dolly Parton.

Born in one of the poorest parts of our country, Dolly's childhood was one far from luxury. Along with her parents, she and her eleven siblings grew up in a small house right at the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in Locust Ridge, Tennessee. She learned how to sing from her mother and then grew her performance skills singing in the local church. By the time she was 10, she was writing her own songs and dreaming of a bigger stage.

Dolly is now 75 years old and has achieved just about every award possible for her music. She's topped charts in country and pop. She's reached No.1 on the billboard charts 25 times. She's won 22 Grammys and 50 nominations. She's won Country Music Awards, Peoples Choice Awards, and been nominated for Tony's and Emmys as well. She's sold more than 100 million albums worldwide. She's in film, she's on the radio, she's appearing in podcasts, and she's known around the world. And despite all of this, Dolly never seems to forget where she came from.

She sings about her *Tennessee Mountain Home* and she talks about her childhood running alongside the mountain streams, but it's more than just words and songs keeping Dolly and the Great Smoky Mountains woven together in time.

As Dolly's career began to take off and her financial situation became more secure, she continued to invest in her community. She did it through music writing and performing songs like "9 to 5" in which she sings out against harsh working conditions and low wages. She started the "My People Fund" when Gatlinburg and parts of Sevier County (her home county) were ravaged by fire. This fund provided over \$10,000 to 900 families as they recovered and sought to rebuild their lives. Born out of her own experience growing

¹ <https://www.ap.org/explore/divided-america/#about-contact>

up with a father who could not read, she created the Imagination Library in 1995. The library first sought to increase literacy in rural Tennessee, but in 25 years of existence now boasts that they've given away over 100 million books to children worldwide. She invested a million dollars to research that led to the Moderna vaccine *and* she even created a ten-week YouTube series called, "Goodnight With Dolly" to help children and families during the early months of the pandemic. Dolly said she did it to provide, "a welcome distraction during a time of unrest and also inspire a love of reading and books."²

What is not to love about Dolly?

She's a champion for many who feel they have lost their voice. She's a success story from an underdog little girl from nowhere Tennessee. She's smart, she's talented, she's beautiful, she's funny, and most of all, she never forgets where she came from.

I bet people would understand if Dolly didn't give back so much of her hard earned money, fame, and time. At some point she's got to take care of herself right?

Like the Israelites who put in their time in Egypt and in the wilderness, Dolly certainly understands what it means to be poor, to rely on God for every meal, every penny, every breath, and every step forward. And it seems that she also understands that life is often a mix of feast and famine. And when the feast comes, when we have eaten our fill, it would do us well to remember where we come from.

An ancient preacher spells it out pretty clearly in Deuteronomy 8... "Take care, lest you forget the Lord your God and fail to keep his commandments, his rules, his laws...When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God – who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness... and you say to yourselves, 'My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.' Remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth in fulfillment of the covenant that he made on oath with your fathers..."

There is a temptation in times of feasting, when we feel we have arrived in the promised land: either the promotion finally comes, the acceptance letter arrives, luck turns our way, and all is well in the world. Our pantries are full and there isn't a worry in the world. In times like these there can be a temptation to give way to pride, to focus on ourselves and to store up our bounty in reserve thinking: "I've earned it. I've worked hard. I deserve it."

While this may be true, the more we store away for ourselves, the more disconnected and alone we become. We no longer need one another to cook the hot dogs or tend the garden, we don't need one another to carve the wood or paint the picture, we simply rely on ourselves and easily forget where we came from, the community that raised us, taught

² <https://www.vulture.com/2020/11/dolly-parton-vaccine-donation-history.html>

us how to live and pray, how to share and eat, how to sing and dance... how to laugh and even how to cry.

The Israelites heard these words from Deuteronomy 8, this ancient sermon as they were congregating on the plains of Moab about to enter the promised land. All that they had struggled for, had waited for, had worked for – together – was right before their eyes. Looking at Canaan Moses warns them to be careful in their prosperity, careful not to get mixed up about where they'd come from and how they got so far.

It was only by the grace of God that they made it out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and now to the plains overlooking the promise.

We know the story because we've read the whole account... The Israelites do what people do. They went in and got greedy. They forgot the lessons learned in hardship and began looking out for themselves, breaking the rules of the covenant, breaking the commandments to care for one another, to look out for the poor and marginalized, to welcome the foreigner, and to love the stranger. So quickly those sacred promises were out the window as famine turned to feast in the glory of realized promise.

And even though we know that God was still faithful, even when the people rebelled we also know that we don't want to repeat the sins of our ancestors – reveling in riches that we are convinced we earned ourselves while our neighbors struggle to make ends meet, to pay rent, to put food on the table, to take a day off and rest...

We don't want to forget where we came from... do we?

Instead, why don't we make a point to celebrate all that God is doing in our lives and in our community? Why don't we give thanks for *all* that God has entrusted to us and then freely and generously give it back, investing it in our neighbors who could use a little taste of the feast we so often enjoy... entrusting it to the Holy Spirit, dedicating all that we have back to God, back to the communities of faith that raised us, back to our roots, back to the one who formed us and calls us forward in Love... Love of God and love of neighbor.

When we have eaten our fill... will we remember where we came from?