

What Do You Have That You Didn't Receive?

Virgil Warren

Lord, today we consider our place in the larger scheme of things, and so acknowledge you, first of all, as the beginning of all else besides you, the sustainer of all you have made, and the basis for the hope that stretches out before us. Amen

This is the question: What do you have that you didn't receive? Obviously, you have labored long and hard in the process of life. Yet what you have contributed could not have been done without the possibilities and opportunities already in place and the abilities passed down to you. In the countryside around, lie fields where you and your neighbors work the ground, plant the seed, harvest the crops.

But you did not develop that seed or design and build those implements, or transport the fuel and fertilizer to your land or its produce to some final destination. Zooming in more closely, you can appreciate the research that went into developing the fuel for your combines and the technology it took to discover and assemble the materials for manufacturing the metal and rubber in your equipment. Perhaps better than most people, farmers can appreciate how dependent we all are on factors beyond our control and on processes we did not originate—and may not even understand. Were it not for rain and sun, there would be no fruits of our labors, however much we labored.

So we come to this day in this place and to the recognition of those who have provided the circumstances available to us. The grave markers erected all around amount to monuments of remembrance. The flowers planted here are tokens of gratitude. The cemetery itself is a sanctuary of respect, well-kept and beautified to indicate our attitude toward those laid to rest here. The time set aside allows us to step aside from daily demands so we can more reflectively think about our place in the big picture. That frees us to recognize that the vast proportion of what we have was received from those who expended themselves for us, some to that “last measure of devotion.”

Though we contribute to specific results we enjoy, that contribution is less than at first we might suppose. So our response to the situation is that of humility—not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, gratitude—not to forget we are debtors, every one, and to resolve that we will not be a weak link in the chain of remembrance. We pay our heritage forward and provide in our legacy the difference between what we have received and what we have to give. Ours is the rest of the story. We must tell it well.