It’s been quite a fall, hasn’t it? In case you forgot the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. Chicagoans took to the streets the night of Game 7 in excitement and wonder and absolute joy. And, in case you forgot, citizens of the United States chose a new president in an election that highlighted how fragmented and fearful our country is. That, too, drove people to the streets – for some, in disbelief, and for others, out of jubilation.

While certainly gratitude is the order of the day, these past few weeks, and especially the readings for this liturgy, have prompted me to think a lot about faith. We could muse about faith in the lovable losers-no-more in Wrigleyville, or in politicians or our system of government, but this fall feels like a critical moment, for me anyway, to assess our faith in God and in one another. The readings are clear in the message that faith is what saves us, makes us whole, and drives us out of ourselves.

In the first reading from Deuteronomy Moses is talking to the Israelites as they are about to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land. He reminds them that when they were in the desert, they had to rely on God for everything. Faith was a necessity. Once they are in a land where they have enough, more than enough in fact, the temptation will be to forget. That’s right, right? When things are going well, it is so easy to get complacent, to pat ourselves on the back and admire how we got ourselves to this good place. This selective amnesia is dangerous. Remembering God’s justice, mercy, and kindness – not our own – gives us the right perspective and impetus for action. Historical memory invites and sustains faith.
The last line of the gospel reminds us of this, too. “Stand up and go,” Jesus says to the grateful leper, “your faith has saved you.” What struck me this time through this story, though, was that all ten lepers had faith. They all did what Jesus told them to do, and they were all healed. This Samaritan, it seems, was just further along on his faith journey. Perhaps because he was the outsider, not in spite of it, his heart was more open, his mind quicker, his rush of gratitude closer to the surface. The experience of being broken and then made whole invites and sustains faith.

The opening of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians exhorts the church to confidence because of God’s fidelity. What has been begun in them will be brought to completion because “God is faithful.” God’s call has brought them to where they are, and it is God’s action in them that will carry them further. Grace invites and sustains faith.

So my takeaways are twofold this morning. One is the importance of memory. Remembering who God is and what God does – and who we are called to be and do because of our relationship with God, is source and sustenance for faith. Even when we fail to live up to the call, or find ourselves in circumstances that tempt us to despair, then we must cling to faith. The second is the importance of community. God led Israel through the desert, giving them food and water and protection, but they also had to count on each other. To survive they needed to use their gifts in the service of all and to be encouragement to those around them. The ten lepers in the gospel lived in community, Jews slogging through this hard existence with Samaritans, because they had to. Like their ancestors in exodus, their survival depended on what they could do and be for each other in response to both the struggles of life and the outpouring of God’s love in them.

Let us model ourselves on our ancestors. Let us be grateful for the gift of faith, and let us hold fast to it. Let our actions flow spontaneously from faith which does not second-guess ourselves or others. And let our expressions of faith and gratitude be ready and genuine and free. Happy Thanksgiving.