

Choose this Day

King of Glory Lutheran Church

November 7-8, 2020

Year A: Pentecost 23 Semi-continuous reading: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

On this post-election weekend, we are reminded by Joshua that we are in a relationship with the Lord. God is who we serve, follow and obey.

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25 ¹Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ^{3a}Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

¹⁴“Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

¹⁹But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” ²¹And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!” ²²Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” ²³He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” ²⁴The people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” ²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

The peace of the Lord, our God be with you this day. In Christ and through the Holy Spirit, I pray. Amen.

Another election is behind us – kind-of, sort of, maybe...as we record this on Thursday afternoon. Particularly on this weekend after the election, I truly wish that we could all be sitting together in the sanctuary. We could fill this space with our voices and prayers. How I wish we could worship God, share the peace, look into one another’s eyes, and shake hands, together.

I long for that because so much of an election cycle, particularly a presidential election is about what divides us! Any election objectifies people, focusing on

what separates us. The pictures on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of red states and blue states further demonstrate division: a visual reminder of our varying opinions, values, and choices. We are right or left, we are liberal or conservative. Every four years we journey through this painful process of seeing one another as opposites and objects rather than as extremely privileged citizens of a free nation, partaking in a democratic process....together.

What we did this week was important work: the issues we voted on and the ballots we cast. Thank you for exercising your freedom to vote. Perhaps you're sick of it all. Perhaps you're feeling many emotions about the outcomes. You might come to worship this weekend thinking nothing about the election but needing a word of comfort or hope or forgiveness or guidance.

Which is why, especially this year, whatever you are feeling and thinking, it would be fabulous to be together. For when we come to church, while we maintain our partisan preferences as one part of our identity; that is not the focus. God is the focus! We are Christian, brothers and sisters in Christ. We are sinners and saints. We are the priesthood of all believers. Collectively, we are the Body of Christ and God is who we worship. We don't have to vote on that!

Someone left me a cartoon here at church months ago. It's from....The preacher says, "Our religion is what we do when we leave church." Everyone in the pews says, "Amen!" The family sitting in the front row includes a large family, but the youngest girl is scratching her head. After worship ends, she turns to her mom and says, "Mom, because we're going to Wilma's Waffle House and Peter's Putt Putt, is that now our religion?"

Out of the mouths of babes....they are watching aren't they? When God gave the first commandment as "You shall have no other gods before me", God knew we humans might have a tendency to worship other things than God.

Joshua knew this too. Gathering all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, Joshua knows it is the time for God's people to reassert their covenant and commitment to God. He is old and getting ready to die. Just like Moses before him, Joshua realizes the people are capable of following God and capable of falling away. Remember them asking for gods to worship while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Commandments from God? They made golden calves and worshipped those!
(Exodus 32:1-6)

Thus the Lord speaks through Joshua recounting all the ways God has taken care of them in the past. “I brought your ancestors out of Egypt and when you came to the sea, I made the sea come upon them and cover them...I handed the Amorites over to you...I gave you land on which you have not labored, towns you haven’t built, fruit of vineyards you did not plant.” (verses 5-13)

“Therefore! Therefore because of all of this, revere the Lord and choose this day whom you will serve.” (Josh 24:15)

Choose this day whom you will serve. When we cast our ballots we chose who we wanted to serve us as public servants. Today, on the Lord’s Day, we choose whom we serve. None other than Almighty God.

Joshua knows the people’s tendency to worship other gods – small letter g. There are plenty to pick from in this polytheistic land. There are the Mesopotamian gods, the Canannite gods, gods from all the cultures around Israel. Therefore Joshua says, “Choose this day, whom you will serve.”

In today’s culture there are so many things to choose from: choices of brands of water, socks, cereals, or clothes. We can choose insurance policies, apartments or houses, types of cars and the list goes on and on. It’s an element of our society that isn’t always helpful because we can always return it. We can trade it in. We can marry another person, we can elect someone else. We can choose something different.

This independence to choose can lead us into being a throw away culture. A culture that says, “If I don’t like it, I’ll find something different.” That was Joshua’s warning.

He said, “You cannot worship foreign gods and worship the one true God. God is a jealous God longing for your hearts and lives. God made a covenant with you and now is the moment to recommit to the Lord, the God of Israel who brought you into this promised land.”

Joshua himself takes the lead. “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” As for us and our households, whom will we serve?

The danger of presidential cycles, is allowing any candidate to become one of our gods – small g. Politicians cannot do what God does. Putting our hope in

politicians will surely disappoint. We simply become so passionate about their positions, their stances and policies, their vision. We all want our guy to win!

There is no winning as children of God. There is only the hope that God alone can bring. There is only faithful following day after day after day...living into the relationship with God who has first chosen us, loved us, saved us and granted us eternal life.

This aspect of choosing and following isn't always easy. Just look at the disciples, none of them were perfect. Within Jesus' tight circle was Matthew who had been employed by the Romans. Judas stole from the common purse and betrayed Jesus. Peter promised to follow to the very end, but denied his Lord instead. All of us fall short in serving and following faithfully. Yet God is there to redeem.

Joshua knew the people had come this far. They needed reminding of God's mighty acts in the past to save them. They needed reminding of living into the covenant this day.

Thankfully they say yes! "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." It would be absurd to worship any other god. God was their God. How could they forsake God who had brought them this far? They couldn't!

We cannot either. Voting for who serves us in public office is one thing. Choosing whom we will serve, love and obey, is altogether different. We've come this far, too far, to forsake the only God who offers us forgiveness of sins and salvation in this life and the next.

Jesus once offered some very challenging teachings. (John 6:60-68)

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?... The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life...Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Amen!

