

Pentecost 14

Joshua 24:1-2a; 14-18

August 30 & 31, 2015

Choose Whom You Will Serve!

"Decisions, decisions." We make all sorts of decisions, all sorts of choices in our lives. Some of our choices are easy to make. Some are so easy we consider them mundane. We don't even give them much thought. In fact, some of our choices are so mundane they actually are made by other people on our behalf.

There are, however, choices we make that are much more difficult for us. You've been out house hunting. You find the perfect house. However, it is just a bit out of your price range. Now what do you do? Take on more debt than you can handle? Ask family to loan you some additional funds? Choosing to change jobs is often very difficult, perhaps, in part, because we are sometimes hesitant to leave something we know for something that we don't know. The unknown is often a bit frightening to us.

Sometimes our choices are so life changing we find ourselves nearly paralyzed, unable, as it were, to make a choice. Life's easy choices we make without giving them much thought. They just seem to happen. The difficult choices, however, often involve hours of thought and prayerful deliberation, and yes, sometimes procrastination. We need God's help in making those decisions. We need his direction and guidance in our lives.

The man who writes our text this morning, Joshua, found himself needing to make some decisions, some really big decisions. He knew he was soon going to die. And so, he gives one final farewell speech to the people of Israel and its leaders. As you look at this farewell address, Joshua doesn't waste words. He doesn't just ramble on or reminisce of the good times that they had together. Instead he wants them to walk away with one simple thought: **"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve!"** And so, let us take a look at these final words of Joshua under the theme: **"Choose Whom You Will Serve!"** 1. *The Lord who loved to serve you.* 2. *The Lord you love to serve.*

"Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God." When Joshua took over the leadership role of the children of Israel from Moses, he was possibly already in his 80's. Yet, even though he was an old man, he was just starting his life's greatest work. He was filled with both physical and spiritual energy. He had a whole-hearted trust in God's promises. It was now time for the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land. As the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, God gave the land of Canaan to his people. The pages of the book of Joshua cover about 25 years. During those 25 years, God blessed the nation under the leadership of Joshua. It was clear to the children of Israel that they had a God who loved to serve them.

By the time of the text, Joshua was now about 110 years old. It was now time to go home to his Lord. It was time to call the children of Israel together for one last time. **"Joshua said to all the people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says...'"** He begins his final address to the people by reminding them of all that the Lord had done for them. We find that in the verses that are in between the verses in our text – verses 3-13. If you were to read those verses, it is interesting to see how many times the word **"I"** is used as the Lord is talking to the people through Joshua. **"I took...I gave...I afflicted...I brought out...I destroyed...I delivered."** He rescued them from Egypt. He parted the Red Sea. He guided them through the wilderness. He help them defeat their enemies. They had a God who loved to serve them.

As we look at our lives, we need to remember all that the Lord has done for us. The Lord himself says to us: **"You did not choose me, but I chose you."** (John 15:16) We who are spiritually blind, dead in sin and an enemy of God were drawn to Him through His Word and Sacraments. We have been chosen for a purpose: **"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last."** (John 15:16)

The pages of Joshua echo with the sounds of collapsing walls, the clash of swords, the roar of fires and the booming "amen" of God's grateful nation. But through all these sounds, the author sustains this clear message: The Lord has fulfilled his promise of the land, and we can trust him to fulfill all his promises, now serve him! **"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your**

forefathers served 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."

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..." The choice seems easy, but it isn't. The easy choice is to do nothing. The easy choice is to stay right where you are and do nothing. Joshua gave them the hard choice: **"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord."** The hard choice is to change. The hard choice is to make a commitment. The hard choice is to serve God completely and faithfully.

We make choices each day. We choose to get out of bed or not. We choose to shower or not. We choose what to eat for breakfast or supper. We choose what to wear every day. We choose what shoes to put on our feet. We choose the automobiles we drive in. We choose the neighborhoods we live in. Choices! We make them all day long.

As believers in Christ, we choose to serve him. Why? We choose to live our lives for him because we know how much he loves us – so much that he stretched his arms out on a cross for us. We follow Jesus in everything because as Peter said about Jesus in our Gospel Lesson: **"You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."** We trust those words. Our eternal future is founded on those words.

Making this choice to live our faith for Christ is not always easy. Satan is trying everything possible to keep us from doing that. But remember all that God has done for you in love. He has directed everything in this world to carry out his plan of salvation that was put into place back in the Garden of Eden. Not one of his promises have failed you. Jesus showed this incredible love by spreading his arms for us on the cross. There is no doubt God loves to serve you. It is that love that moves you to love to serve your Lord in return. May the Lord help us also to say the words of the children of Israel in our lives: **"Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods!... We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."** Amen.