

7/4/2021

Joshua 24:14-18

Joshua said to all the people...14 "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 17 It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 18 And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

We Will Serve the Lord

Well, what an absolutely glorious day this is, Amen? Did you know that it was 70 Sunday's ago that we worshipped the Lord together in one service at 10:00am? 70 weeks ago! Wow. I don't know about you, but it feels as though we lived through an entire year and a half of the twilight zone, right? It simultaneously feels like it never happened while also feeling like it would never end. It's been a strange time of doing a lot of things we never thought we'd have to do but also getting to see God do things we never expected, either. In fact, I'd like to remember with you all the things that we've seen God do in the midst of this challenging time. It can pertain to the pandemic, itself, but it doesn't have to. Let's all think back over the last year and a half and remember what God has done.

I'll start us off:

- God helped our church have an online presence with our Facebook page and Youtube account.
- God brought some new folks into our church.
- I got Honey
- Dale came to live with us
- Jared moved to Waterford
- I got ordained

Look at all these things God has done in our lives throughout the last year and a half! It can be hard to remember this when we look back on 2020 and the first half of 2021. There were so many challenges and even quite a bit of heart ache for many of us, AND there have been so many good gifts and opportunities to see God's faithfulness, too.

In today's scripture reading there is another list of things God has done for the Israelite's and it's in response to a question that Joshua, their leader, poses to them. Joshua asked the people who they were going to serve – would they serve other gods or are they going to serve the Lord God, the one true God?

Why does Joshua ask this of the people? Because he knows just how easy and tempting it is for God's people to become distracted and wander away from serving the Lord and instead serve other gods. And it seems as though in verses 14 and 15, the people had begun to be distracted by what Joshua refers to as, "the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, and the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living." These foreign gods were becoming the subject of their worship, admiration, and service, and Joshua was confronting his people with this ever important question: You're going to serve someone – which god who are you going to serve?

Let's ask ourselves this same question today. We are going to serve something – which god are we going to serve? You know, just like the Israelites, if we're not asking ourselves this question, it can be very easy and tempting to take our attention off of the one true God and end up serving other, lesser gods. It still happens to you and me today, just as it did in the days of Joshua and the Israelites. Our gods might not have the same names as those back then, but we humans are always tempted to find other things to serve other than God. As the famous hymn, **Come Thou Fount**, says,

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let Thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above

We are prone to wander from our Lord and serve other gods. Just as Joshua asked the people long ago, let's ask ourselves this same question. Who are we going to serve?

What does it look like to serve the one true God? **There are 3** characteristics of what serving the Lord God looks like.

First, serving God looks like doing that which is FROM God. I was reminded of this so frequently as many of you celebrated my ordination with me. Many of the cards and gifts I was given have this beautiful verses as a reminder on it:

Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to

prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And another verse from Proverbs 16, verse 9: “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” God has a plan for your life. God has a purpose for you to be on this earth. Our entire existence is a gift FROM God and so is our purpose. Are we serving the Lord God by doing the work FROM him that he has for us to do? Maybe your purpose is to be a mommy or daddy or grandma or grandpa to little ones and teach them how to grow up loving God. Maybe your purpose is to work with those who are less fortunate by seeing Jesus in them and making sure they have food and water to eat and drink. Maybe your purpose is to tell your coworkers about the love of Jesus. Maybe your purpose has changed recently because of living in a new season of life. What does God have for you to do in this world?

Which leads us right into the second characteristic of what it looks like to serve God. Serving God looks like doing thing WITH God. Our God is Jesus and his name is Emmanuel which means God with us. God came from heaven to earth in the form of Jesus to show us that He is WITH us. And then after Jesus ascended to heaven, God sent his Spirit on the day of Pentecost to empower us to do the work he has for us to do. We enact our purpose WITH the help, WITH the power, of God. Our June memory verse (and my favorite verse of the Bible) reminds us of this very thing. Philippians 1:6, “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” God’s work in us empowers us to do what

he's calling us to do. If we feel discouraged in our purpose, we can be assured that God is ready and willing to help us because God is working WITH us.

And the final characteristic of serving God. Serving God looks like doing things FOR God. When you and I know that God created for a purpose, and when we recognize that God is WITH us and empowers us to do the work he has for us, we begin to understand that what we do, in and of itself, is FOR God. Our actions are the very gift God desires.

There once was a young boy who sat in church and watched as the offering plate was being passed. Truly wanting to give something to the Lord, he reached inside his pocket for something to put in. But to his dismay, his pockets were completely empty. As the plate was passed down the row, he thought of something he could give to God. The offering plate came to him, and to the usher's surprise, he placed the plate on the ground and stepped inside. The little boy got right. Even though he had nothing monetary to give, he gave the most important thing he had—himself.

Serving God looks like putting our lives in the offering plate and doing things FOR God. I'd like to bring your attention to the blue paper you were handed when you came in this morning. At the very beginning of the year we looked at this blue paper together. You can see up at the top of the paper it says, *"Just as the Wise Men honored Jesus by giving him valuable gifts, I want to give Jesus the following in 2021."* And when we looked at this page together at the beginning of the year, I said that I'd bring this paper back out a few more times

during 2021 to remind us of what we said we'd like to give Jesus and to check in on how we're doing with giving these gifts to God.

As you look down the page, you'll see the second section are all ways we can serve God by doing things FOR Him. Offering forgiveness to others, inviting our pre-Christian friends and family members to church with us, using our voice as a testimony of how God works in the world, offering God our resources, **our relationships**, our bodies, and our time.

How are you doing this year with your gifts to God? I have to admit that it was good for me to revisit this page halfway through the year....ehem....Did you know that the first half of 2021 is over? Yeah, a bit of a wakeup call for me too! How are you doing this year? Who are you choosing to serve in 2021? Every one of us must decide for ourselves who we are going to serve.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, there is a moment for Jesus' 12 disciples chose who they were going to follow. As Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in a city called Capernaum, Jesus began teaching about how he is the bread of life. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life!...50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

The people listening to Jesus in the synagogue were very confused with these ideas Jesus was teaching and so the Gospel of John tells us that many of Jesus' disciples walked away from him that day. After many had left, Jesus turned to the core of 12 disciples and asked, "Are you going to leave?"

Joshua's question to the Israelites strikes at the core of human temptation. From Adam and Eve who wandered from God and chose their own way, to Jesus and his disciples, to us today, we all must decide who we are going to serve. The one true God or some other god.

Jesus' 12 disciples responded with Peter's words as he told Jesus, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

And the Israelite people responded to Joshua (in our scripture reading) by saying they do want to serve the one true God because this God is the one who has done so many things for them. In their answer they basically say, "How could we ever think about serving another god? Look at all He has done for us!"

Friends, [lift up communion elements] how could we ever think about serving another god? Look at all he has done for us!

[Bless communion elements] On the night...

Who are we going to serve? Look at all he has done for us.

The table is set for you and the meal is prepared. Christ our Lord invites to his table all those who love him, who repent of their sin, and who desire to live in

peace with one another. As you come forward, recommit your life to Christ and choose to serve him...because look at all he has done for us.

Not a United Methodist table...

[Final instructions]

Come and receive the grace of God.