

The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

September 6, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Joshua 24:1-2, 14-18

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. Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says:..." 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. 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." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers 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. 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." (NIV)

This last Wednesday at Beautiful Savior Lutheran School they had a couple who served as missionaries in Indonesia come and speak to the children. This couple had been pulled from this strongly Muslim country because of the hostility and danger over there. They told one story of how some radicals one night attacked a Christian university. They waited until all the students were asleep in the dorm. Then they threw smoke bombs into it and when the Christians ran out they began to spear them. The police out of fear of the Muslim leaders just looked the other way until they were all killed. Just a little over a mile away and a few days later one of our WELS mission churches happened to have their confirmation Sunday that week. Think of the question our children answer on confirmation. *"Do you promise to be faithful to Jesus, and rather face death itself, than forsake your Savior?"* Imagine knowing what had just happened to the Christians nearby and yet answering: *"Yes, as God gives me strength."* Now that is being committed!

Today, Joshua stands before the people of Israel looking for the same kind of commitment. Joshua wants the people to live for the Lord. He wants them to serve Him only. He wants them to be faithful to the one true God and forsake all others. As Joshua questions the people about whom they will serve, I pray we also take this question to heart. I pray we, like the people of Israel, recommit ourselves to the Lord today and everyday. I pray the Holy Spirit working through God's Word leads us to proclaim with Joshua: **As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**

The Lord used Joshua to do some great things. Joshua had the unenviable task of replacing Moses and leading God's people into a land occupied by mighty and hostile nations. Yet, Joshua, being strong and courageous, put his trust in the Lord and all Israel's enemies fell before them. They entered the new and wonderful promised land where they could enjoy rest. But now, before Joshua would be called to heaven, he wants

to renew the covenant and have the people recommit themselves to the Lord their God. We read: ***“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. Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.”***

Joshua gathers all the people and has the leaders come forward. He gathers them at Shechem - a city in the dead center of Canaan about 35 miles north of Jerusalem. This was the same place Abraham was first promised that the land would one day belong to his many descendants - the place where Abraham built an altar to the Lord - the place where Jacob once purified his house from all idols. Here at Shechem Joshua wants the people to listen once again to the Lord, the God of Israel.

We read a portion of what the Lord God has to say: ***“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.*** God will not share His glory with another. The Lord wants them to revere and respect and serve Him alone. They can’t serve both the Lord and still worship other gods. He is repeating His very first commandment ***“you shall have no other gods.”*** The Lord wants His people to fear and love and trust in Him above all things.

So Joshua presents the people with a choice. ***“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.”*** Either serve the Lord or he says if that is undesirable (literally the Hebrew says if that is evil for you) then serve the false gods of your forefathers or the gods of these Canaanites in whose land you are now living. ***“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”*** Who do you choose to serve?

That is quite a question. Before we hear their answer we need to put this into context. As good Lutherans we know it is impossible by our own thinking or choosing to believe or come to faith. That’s why while our text doesn’t include verses 3-13 those verses are vital to understanding this question. The Lord is not calling on unbelievers to choose Him - that is impossible. He is calling upon His people who have already been chosen. Verses 3-13 make it clear that God did all the choosing, all the giving, and all the loving from beginning to end. All that they had and all that they were had nothing to do with their goodness, but everything to do with God’s grace. He picked them even though they were no better than any other idolaters. He delivered them even though they did not do a single thing to deserve it. He protected them and guided them and gave them a land of blessings in spite of them and their sinfulness. It was all the Lord their God - it had nothing to do with them.

Now as God’s chosen and blessed people Joshua calls upon them to respond to God’s saving action. They are not being asked to choose to become children of God for that is what they already were, rather by the grace of God, they are to choose to remain with the Lord who made them His children or forsake the Lord for other things. Joshua asks if they will serve the Lord who loved them and saved them, or serve other gods who are nothing and have done nothing for them. Do you see why Joshua responded with a resounding: ***“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*** Joshua placed His trust in the Lord and followed His God even when others did not. He obeyed when others ran. For Him and His house their was only one He had and would continue to love & serve - the Lord His God.

They had a Lord that found them when they were lost. They had a Lord that gave promises to Abraham and His descendants when they did absolutely nothing to deserve it. They had Lord God who rescued them slavery and protected and guided them on their journey. They had a God who defeated all their enemies. The Lord their God chose them out of all the people of the earth to be His own and gave them the promised land. Sound familiar anyone? Don't you and I have the exact same Lord? Didn't our Lord God also rescue us when we did nothing to deserve it? Like Israel, don't we too have a history of unfaithfulness and idolatry - a history of putting money, and friends, and possessions, and job, and so many others things ahead of the Lord? Yet, like Israel we have a Lord who acted to save us from all our enemies. We have a God who has provided us with a promised land - an inheritance far greater than the land of Canaan.

The Lord did it all through the New Testament Joshua. Joshua is the Old Testament Hebrew name for the New Testament Greek name Jesus. The word means "*He saves*" or "*Savior*." Jesus saved us by keeping all God's commandments for us - including the first commandment that we have broken. Jesus feared and He loved and He trusted God above all. He lived and served His whole life. Then He served us all by offering His life as a ransom for all sin - our sin. He paid our price. On the cross Jesus suffered and died for our unfaithfulness. Then Jesus came out of the grave to show that all our enemies (sin, death, and the devil) are defeated and we can look forward to living in a land where we will have eternal rest.

Now the Lord God asks us through His Word: "***Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve?***" He asks this of us whom He has already chosen through the water and the Word of baptism. He asks this of us who know the Savior and enjoy the rest of knowing that, in Him, all our sins are forgiven. He asks this of us who are reminded in His Word of all the great things our Lord God does for us. How can we answer in any other way than to say with the people of Israel: "***Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!... We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.***" How can we not say with Paul: "***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me***" (Galatians 2). When others leave Jesus, how can we not turn to Jesus like Peter and answer: "***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.***" Knowing the Lord our God how can we say anything else but proclaim with Joshua: "***As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.***"

Knowing what we do about our Lord and His saving love that becomes such an easy thing to say. But now dear friends the most difficult part lies ahead. Now we face the challenge of doing it each and every day. Yet, how blessed is the home where the Lord is served. May we recommit ourselves today. May we strive to worship, love, and obey the one true God and make our homes His dwelling. May we fear, love and trust in the Lord above all things. May we commit ourselves to say: "***Give me Jesus, even if it means my death.***" May these words be more than just as plaque on our wall: "***As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.***" Amen.

