

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

November 12, 2017

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A Crisis of Choice

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

May the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ live in you. Amen.

***“You're gonna have to serve somebody,
yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.”***

In today's Old Testament lesson, we have Joshua's final “state of the union” address to the children of Israel. In this speech, Joshua recounts their history, their present state of affairs, and the future God had promised them.

Joshua instructs the people to respect God and serve him with their whole heart, completely, exclusively. I'm sure it brought to their minds the Commandments that spoke of their being committed to God.

In his speech, Joshua voices one of the most remembered verses of scripture in the Bible. With this statement, he draws a line in the sand for the children of Israel. Joshua presents to them a way of living on which he personally will not compromise.

“Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

My apologies to those who are schooled in matching correct word tenses and sentence structure to achieve proper English grammar, but sometimes common ordinary language says it best.

“I don't know what you gone do, but you need to know that me and everybody born with my blood flowing through their veins, my family; we gone serve the Lord.”

Joshua is very old and is about to go the way of his fathers; he knows his time is almost up. And so, he wants the children of Israel, and particularly the leadership, to hear one more time, from his mouth, God's Words for their living together in community as His chosen people. Joshua encourages them to renew the covenant God had made with them through Moses; just like a couple would renew their marriage vows.

Many couples, after a lengthy time of being together, want to reaffirm their love and fidelity to each other, by saying "I Do," again. Likewise, Joshua wants the children of Israel to publicly entrust their lives again to God.

And the scriptures tell us that the people faithfully pledged their allegiance to God; not once, not twice, but three times.

"We remember what He has done for us. Nothing could be further from our minds than serving other gods over the One True God."

Their response makes you want to snicker a bit. The children of Israel had good intentions. We all do. We look back at what God has done for us and we look at what God is doing for us; we "count our blessings, we name them one by one," but then the very moment something does not go our way, we complain and question what we perceive as God's involvement or lack of involvement in our lives.

Joshua reminds the children of Israel that God will not put up with their foolishness. Yes, He is compassionate and loving, but He is also just and righteous and will hold them accountable for their unfaithfulness.

And to that end, Joshua sets up a memorial to serve as a visual witness that the Israelites made a commitment to God to serve only Him. So, as the Israelites went about their daily routine, the stone would remind them of the choice they made.

Choices . . . for some, making such a decision is easy, for others not so much. Children use various nonsensical rhymes to help them make choices between one thing or another.

Rhymes like "Blue Shoe," "One Potato," or "Engine Engine" would determine who was "it," or "officially" decide the "one" who would become the object or person selected.

Joshua called the people to make a choice, to decide freely their preference of a god to worship and serve.

"You're gonna have to serve somebody,

***yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody."***

Singer and songwriter, Bob Dylan had it right. To live a meaningful life, you have to start with making a decision.

"Choose you this day whom you will serve."

For you see, the children of Israel had many gods to choose from such as Anu, the sky god; Osiris, the god of the underworld; Anubis, the god of the dead; and Seth, the god of evil; just to name a few.

But there was only One God who had claimed them as His treasured possession. There was only One God who had delivered them from slavery. There was only One God who had fulfilled His promise, kept them safe from harm and brought them to the land of Canaan.

God had set them apart for a holy purpose, just as our baptism, our covenant relationship with God through Christ, sets us apart for a holy purpose; yes, to tell the "good news," but specifically to show to others through our actions, this awesome God we serve. And because of the nature of the covenant, the Son's life given for us, it is our responsibility, out of gratitude, to give our lives in service to God.

God has expectations of us, in response to His gracious gift. God wants complete devotion and loyalty. He will not tolerate our "half-stepping" or "frontin," you know, when we pretend, just to impress others, but our heart is far from God.

And don't think Joshua's message is just for the children of Israel. It is a vital question for us today.

As Martin Luther would say, anything that we fear, anything that we love, anything that we trust above everything else, that is our god. Oh, we have our own gods too.

Let's see. There is Mammon, the god of material goods, whether it be money or possessions. Vanity, the goddess of success, degrees and titles. Power, the god of prestige and influence. Technology, the goddess of electronic gadgets. And of course, Nostalgia, the goddess of the "good ole' days," whether it be programs or people.

Please don't misunderstand me. Any of these things in and of itself are not necessarily objects of worship, unless, we make them so.

Joshua is calling for a well – thought - out awareness of the Divine source and provision of our very existence. Joshua is calling for a faithful response; for there is no credible alternative, no formidable contender, there is no equal to our God.

“Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

Amen.