

**14th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**August 26, 2018**

Text: Joshua 24:1-2a and 14-18

Theme: Choose this Day

It was more than six years ago that I accepted the call to become your pastor. Since that time I include in my daily prayers a petition asking God to help me discern where we are as a congregation and how we are doing in our life together. I want us to be on a good path and I want God to be a part of that conversation. Often I end the petition with words of thanksgiving because God has indeed blessed us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit we have grown in our study of Scripture, we have strong and compassionate leaders, we have found significant ways to support one another in our faith journeys, we have offered worship services that lift our voices to God in praise, and overall we are in a time of stability. We are far from perfect but here at Redeemer there are visible signs of vitality and growth. And in all of that we rejoice!

However I do not want us to become so comfortable with all the good that we do here that we lose our desire to move forward. We have to allow the church to change with the changing times. For instance we are no longer the little white church off Georgetown Pike. Now we have this magnificent building that needs our constant care so that we can open its doors for worship and for our service to the community. We now have a wealth of resources when we take into consideration our finances and the number of people who call this their church home.

Based on where we are and how we are poised to move into the future, it is a perfect day for us to stand with Joshua as he calls the different tribes and leaders to Shechem. He summons them together because it is time for them to cross over into the Promised Land. It is time for them to move forward. Their future lies in front of them. It is within their reach. But before they cross the threshold into the next phase of their life together, Joshua wants them to remember their history and their relationship with God.

He helped them remember how God called Abraham to be the *father of all nations* and opened the womb of Sarah to give birth to Isaac. It was God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush when he commissioned Moses to deliver the people from the heavy-handed Egyptians. And once delivered out of their bondage it was God who provided for them in the wilderness with manna and quail and water from a rock.

And when Joshua was done he implored the people to –  
*Choose this day whom you will serve.*

Like Joshua, I implore us to decide whom we will serve because we are also about to enter a new phase of our ministry. Marlon has been mentoring our youth for the past five years and he is leaving us to become a mission developer. He has blessed us with his depth of faith. He has planted seeds with our youth that are rooted in his love for Jesus Christ. It will be a difficult task to replace him but we are in the middle of that process right now.

At the same time that we are in this search for a new director for our Youth Ministry, Deacon Erin is halfway through her internship. By the end of the year she hopes to complete her studies. She will transition from *Word and Service* ministry to *Word and Sacrament* ministry. And our council hopes to meet this fall to set a vision for our church for the decade to come.

We recall all the blessings we have received. We send Marlon into the mission field. We continue to nurture Deacon Erin as she grows into her new role. We are mindful of our resources and we want to make wise decisions on how best to use them. We have new faith groups developing. We have new opportunities to serve. All of that lies right in front of us. It is within our reach. However, before we cross this threshold I implore us to first consider whom we will serve.

I am convinced that this is not as easy as it seems because Joshua had to repeat it several times to the people. He told them that once they remember all that God did on their behalf, they had to make a decision whom they would worship and whom they would serve. They were to put away all of the other gods in their lives and serve the one true God with sincerity and in faith.

In one of our Bible study classes someone wanted to know what we would consider our *other gods* to be. Luther defined a *god* as that to which we look for all good and in which we take refuge. I would be bold enough to add that which takes us away from love of God and love of neighbor. In our class people were quick to name money and sports and our jobs and our families and our hobbies and any of our possessions as our *other gods*. In and of themselves, they are not gods but when they replace our trust and faith in God then God is no longer our first priority.

Choosing this day the One whom we will serve deserves some serious thought. There are so many things that clamor for our attention and devotion. We have to be careful not to let any of them become more of a priority than our relationship with God.

I thought a lot this week about the different ways we can keep God foremost in our hearts and minds and the list was exhaustive. I thought about how we can make conscious decisions that demonstrate that we worship and serve him alone and I came to the conclusion that I cannot stand here and judge your worship habits or how you choose to serve the Lord. But in all gentleness I can challenge all of us with these questions:

How can we keep God in his rightful place in our lives? How can we honor God not only on Sunday mornings but throughout the rest of the week? Where do we currently invest most of our time, money, and energy? Where do we currently place God on our list of priorities? What changes do we need to make to devote ourselves to God first?

This is what I know for sure: The more we rely on ourselves to pursue our own desires, the more our desires spin out of control. And when we spin out of control then our lives become more stressful and more frustrating. But the more we pursue a closer relationship with God above all else, the better we are able to distinguish between what is truly important and what we need to let go.

Consider what it would take for us to make an irreversible decision to make our relationship with God our highest priority – over everyone and everything else in our lives. No matter what happens to us from this point on, we would do our very best to avoid wasting time and energy on what does not matter.

When I stand on the threshold of the Promised Land, I envision people coming here (or to any house of worship) on a regular basis because it is one place where we can deepen our relationship with God. I envision this to be a safe space where people can explore ways to reach their full potential. I envision a scene where a small group of people are studying Scripture as they learn how to become disciples for Christ. I envision another space where people will encourage each other in faith, pray for one another, hold each other accountable, and give each other support. I envision people including in their daily prayers a petition that invites God to give them the discernment they need to see what adjustments need to be made that reflect our honest decision to make God our first priority – in worship and in service to him.

I do not want us to be a church that skips over this first step. With Joshua I state with confidence – As for me (and this household) let us decide to worship and serve the Lord alone. Amen