

“Choose This Day”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
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**Joshua 24: 1-2, 14-24**

Each and every day, we are faced with choices we must make. Some of them are mundane and routine, while others are more significant and could be life-changing. What do these choices look like, and what is our motivation in making these choices?

There are many innocuous and seemingly routine choices we make every day. We wake up in the morning and have to decide what clothes we are going to wear. Our choice may be motivated by what the weather forecast is for the day, what is on our schedule for the day, what we noticed our friends or co-workers wearing this week, or frankly, what clothes are clean in the closet!

As we go through our day, we make choices as to what we will have to eat to sustain us for the day ahead. Our choices may be motivated by our health and a desire to follow a diet, by how busy our schedule is and the time we have to eat, by what is or is not in the refrigerator at home, or by how we are feeling physically – whether we feel well or whether we feel sick.

In order to go about our day – to get to work, to get to school, to run our errands – we have to make choices related to our routes for driving or the means by which we get place to place. Our choices may be motivated by the traffic reports on the radio or television, how far we have to travel, whether or not we are running behind schedule, and what modes of transportation are readily available to us.

Some other choices we make can have a longer-lasting impact on our lives and the lives of those we love and care about. At some point, we have made a choice about where we live. Our choice has been motivated by the amount of space we need, what we can afford, whether we will rent or purchase our home, how far it is to work or school, and how safe we feel in the neighborhood.

If we have children, our choice to live in a particular location is also motivated by the schools where they will attend. We might choose to live in a particular location because of the quality of the schools for that neighborhood. We might choose to leave a particular location because of concerns we have about our children’s education with that school system.

And a major choice for any young person is what he or she will choose to do following high school. Will he or she choose to attend a college or university? Will she or he choose to stay close to home or go far away for their continued education? Will he or she choose to enter vocational training or the military? Or will she or he make a choice? And how will any of these choices influence their future, their families, and our community?

Finally, the choices we make in relationship with one another can have a life-long impact on us. As we are drawn closer to a certain individual, what choices do we make to show our commitment and love? As we are friends with classmates, co-workers, and neighbors, what choices do we make to renew those relationships,

to forgive past wrongs, or to stay committed in the face of struggles and distance? As we are members of families, both small and large, what choices do we make to either strengthen the bonds which connect us, or to weaken those bonds due to past hurts, pains, and unresolved conflicts?

Each and every day, we are faced with choices we must make. Some are mundane and routine, while others are more significant and life-changing. And each choice we make has particular motivations that influence what we decide.

But how is our faith reflected in each of those choices? How does our faith motivate what decisions we make?

When we choose what and how much we will eat, do we consider how our bodies are gifts from God that must be properly nourished and taken care of? When we choose whether to go to the doctor, or whether or not to exercise, or whether or not to engage in destructive, addictive habits, do we consider how our faith in God is reflected in the choice we are making?

When we choose where we are going to live, is our faith reflected in that choice? If we decide to move from a neighborhood for concern over crime or dropping property values, are we motivated by fear rather than faith? Or when we choose to send our child to a particular school, is that motivated by our own worldview or by God's worldview? Do we see only the negatives of different races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds, or can we see the positives of learning from diverse peoples and that all are created in the image of God?

When we choose to stay disconnected from someone who has harmed or hurt us, is that reflective of our faith in a God who has forgiven each of us through Jesus Christ? When our hearts are hardened towards a spouse, a friend, a neighbor, a brother or sister in Christ, is that the choice we feel compelled to make based on the faith we have professed, "to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you?" (Ephesians 4:32).

Every choice we make is reflective of our faith. Whether it is our relationships, the use of our material resources, the decisions we make about our vocation – all of these and more are influenced by our faith – or our lack of faith – in God.

A great deal has happened in the life of Israel and of Joshua prior to what we have read this morning from chapter 24. Joshua was a mighty warrior, defeating the peoples of Canaan with much determination and leading the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land. Joshua was a fiercely devoted man to the Lord, and the Lord rewarded Joshua for his devotion with victories and claims of the land of Canaan.

But as all people do, Joshua grew old. There came a point when his body could no longer take the battles and wars, and all that was left was his deep commitment to God. He was concerned about the people of Israel, though, and whether they fully understood what faith and devotion to God was all about. They tended to see the other gods of the peoples they had conquered, and were not always so exclusive in their commitment to the Lord.

And so Joshua calls the people together at Shechem, for he knows his life is near its end. He recounts for them all which they have been through together, and how the Lord has been right there guiding them and protecting them throughout. The Lord has provided for them a land on which they have not worked, and towns

and cities which they have not built (24:13). They have been conquerors of the land up until now, but now they are going to be settlers of the land. Just as they had been in a transition before, they will be in another transition now.

But this transition will require a new devotion and commitment to the Lord their God, and Joshua is not sure whether they have it in them. Joshua says to them, “You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good” (24:19-20). To serve and honor this Lord requires much. It requires sincerity and faithfulness, it requires turning away from other distractions and temptations, it requires giving of your whole self to God’s commands and obeying them fully. Joshua knows this because of how God has acted in his life. Now he is trying to admonish the Israelites that this level devotion will require a great, great deal.

More than anything, it means making a choice. Choosing to serve the one Lord who is Creator of this world. Choosing to serve without hesitation or diversion whatever God calls on you to do through his Spirit. Choosing to be faithful in the most dire of circumstances.

Joshua challenged the Israelites to make a choice at Shechem. Either follow the Lord your God, or follow all those foreign gods that belong to the Ammorites, the Moabites, and the Canaanites. Don’t be wishy-washy. Don’t try to have the best of both worlds. Don’t attempt to straddle the fence and think that God isn’t watching you. Make a choice: either Yahweh or Baal. Joshua has made his choice: “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (24:15). Now it is up to the people to make their choice.

“Choose this day whom you will serve.” That is as applicable to us today as it was in Joshua’s time. The choice of whom we will serve is reflected: in the way we spend our time; in the way we treat our neighbor as a sister or brother in Christ; and in the way we spend the money and resources God has first given to us.

In our life together as an Open, Caring, Community, I believe we have responded to that challenge as Joshua did: “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” I consider the many new and continuing ways we have sought to enrich, build-up, and engage members of our community, and I know this day who we serve. Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, binding up the broken-hearted – these are all evident by the choices we have made as a church with the investments of our talents, our time, our facility, and our resources.

I consider the intentional ways we have sought to strengthen and deepen the faith of future generations of disciples of Jesus Christ, and I know this day who we serve. Teaching God’s Word, mentoring young people, serving alongside one another in mission, playing and joyfully celebrating God’s love for us in Jesus Christ – these are all evident by the choices we have made as a church with the investments of our time, our staff, our talents, and our resources.

I consider the vibrant, diverse, and impactful ways we have sought to draw closer to God in worship and in caring for one another in all times of life, and I know this day who we serve. Singing praise to God, sharing our gifts of music, drama, and art, bringing a meal, offering a ride, sharing a listening ear – these are all evident by the choices we have made as a church with the investments of our

time, our resources, our staff, our lay leadership, and our living out our calling as an Open. Caring. Community.

But the choices we make as disciples of Christ's Church also reflect our faith in the one we choose to serve. We would be naïve to think that the choices we make as disciples of Christ's Church will have no impact on this church's future mission.

We may assume that there will always be new people coming into the church's life, who will give as others have given, and that the church will always be there for us, just as it has in the past. We can continue to give on our terms – give of our money, our time, our commitment – and God will still be there for us in the form of the church.

But when we make those assumptions, we are indeed making a choice. We are choosing to place more of a burden on others, rather than equally sharing in the calling of discipleship. We are choosing to let our faith be about us, rather than about God. We are choosing which gods we will serve, and the Lord our God is grieving and saddened by our choices.

There is a church I pass in Brownsburg every time I go to get my haircut. The original congregation has built a new building somewhere else in town, and this building has had a “for sale” sign out front for a couple of years. Another church now worships in their old space, but the “for sale” sign was still there this week. It's a juxtaposition, to be sure: to see a worshipping congregation advertised, while reading, “Church and Residence for Sale.”

When we choose to give to God what's left over, rather than give to God first out of what we have been given, we should not be surprised by how that will impact the future. When we choose to give as we always have, even though we could give more, we should not be surprised by how that will impact the future. When we choose to not give and assume others will carry the day, we should not be surprised by how that will impact the future.

Stewardship is not about an organization's survival. Stewardship is about choosing whom we will serve, and living that choice out in our actions. Today, when we are challenged with, “Choose this day whom you will serve,” may our response be as Joshua's: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.