

August 16, 2015
Sermon The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Joshua 24:1–2a (ESV)

¹ Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. ² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.

Joshua 24:14–18 (ESV)

¹⁴ “Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” ¹⁶ Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, ¹⁷ for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. ¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” Joshua proclaimed (v 15). These words may be familiar. We put them on rustic wooden plaques and hang them near our front door. You can buy posters, stickers, decals, bumper stickers, and more.

We want everyone to know that we are Christians and fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

And so did the people of Israel. *“Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God,”* they said (v 18).

But not so fast ... were they really serious? Or were they merely playing lip service to God...saying one thing while it suited them and ready to go back to their old ways when the crisis was over?

Joshua told the people. *“You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God”* (24:19).

God requires nothing less than service with our whole heart and faithfulness that does not falter. The people honored their vow for a while, but soon enough they began to worship other gods.

Whether or not we have a plaque hanging in our doorway, I'm sure we'd all like to make Joshua's vow our own. As for us and our houses, we'd all like to serve the Lord. But how can we? As sinful as we are, just as sinful as Israel was,

How Can We Keep Our Vow to Serve the Lord?

Like Israel, we serve the Lord . . . but, we serve many other gods as well (1–2a,14–15).

Yes, we're ready to commit ourselves to the Lord.

We know that God the Father sent His Son to die and rise again to save us.

We know Jesus freed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

We know that the Holy Spirit came to us in Baptism to make us His sons and daughters.

We love God because He first loved us.

We are moved to commit our lives to God.

So why not say, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*"?

We can, and we should.

Yet the keeping of such a vow is not as easy as it seems, because we like to serve other things too.

Now just to be clear, we don't go to Buddhist temples or bow down to other false gods.

Yet there are things we rely on, things to which we devote our time and energy, things we trust along with God and His Word. We lean on our physical or financial abilities. We are either too tough to let something get us down or we think we can just buy our way out of something. Or the government will bail us out...or maybe we think we can get by with things because we are just so cute or charming, that we can get away with things that no one else can.

But the fact remains, in the end, anything you trust in during times of trouble is your god.

Martin Luther explains our gods this way:

“For these two belong together, faith and God. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (LC I 3).

God wants us to trust in Him alone, but we also rely on other things, those “*gods beyond the River or in Egypt*” (v 14) that our Text spoke about.

Some of those god’s beyond the river show themselves when we trust in wealth, others in a drug or drink, others in relationships, being popular or well respected. The truth is, in one way or another, all of us trust in things in this life.

But the thing is, even the best and most reliable things in this world will sooner or later fail us or pass away.

Even the largest fortunes can evaporate in a stock-market crash, through spending or a natural disaster. It runs through our fingers like water.

Drugs and alcohol make you feel good and forget your troubles, but sooner or later they will exact their price. The “feel good” doesn’t last and then you are usually even worse off than when you started.

How about our spouses and families? They support us in times of trouble, but they also become ill and die.

Fame and popularity very rarely last long. “What have you done for me lately?” is the rule of fame.

All are poor choices to trust, poor choices to serve.

And we break our vow to the Lord for these fleeting things?!

But Jesus came not to be served but to serve. When we give up or give out, Jesus continues to serve us...He continues to give and give and give!

And He NEVER FAILS!!

Only God can be trusted not to fail when we need Him the most.

So why don't we call in His name?

God is often the refuge of last resort for us.

We wait until all our other support systems fail before we cry out to Him,
"Lord, have mercy."

Thank God, He does have mercy! He doesn't leave us in our sins,
wondering why we never asked for help.

Even though God the Son deserves our complete devotion and has every
right to ignore our pleas, He had compassion on us and set aside His glory for
our sake.

Sent to earth by God the Father, He was born of the Virgin Mary and
became one of us.

He lived a perfect life of service to God and to His neighbor, not for his
sake, but for ours ... which God credits to us.

Jesus served us by giving His life as a ransom for the many.
He carried our sins to the cross, where He paid the penalty of our unfaithfulness
to God.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus earned forgiveness of sins for us.
Even though we were unfaithful to God, God was faithful to us.

Now we have life and salvation in his name.

So now, because Jesus served us, we *can* serve the Lord.
When we are tempted to depend on earthly things more than on God, the Holy
Spirit reminds us through the Word and Sacraments where our true security lies.

When we consider all that God has done for us, we respond naturally to praise God for His love, mercies, and blessings. That is our response. Not a payment for services rendered, but a thank you for the gift of life and salvation that we have been given through Christ!

Furthermore, when we then fear, trust, and love God above all things, we want to help others around us. Again, not in payment, but in response to what we have been given. What better way to show our appreciation than to tell others about what we have received.

Now, when “other helpers fail and comforts flee” (*LSB* 878:1), we are not destroyed because our trust is truly in God.

While we are shaken, God is there to help us. To lift us up when we have given up on all hope!

And, when the time is right, in God’s time, Jesus will lift us out of this veil of tears and take us home to be with Him forever.

So, we can boldly say with Joshua and the people of Israel, “*as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

It will not be easy, for we still are inclined to trust in things that cannot bear the weight. But we have strength from the one true, triune God, who served us and gave His life for us.

With that kind of help, we cannot fail.
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria