

2018 NL1 WK6 Joshua 24
18-10-14 Joshua 24:1-15 [16-26]

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

We have a plaque in the entry of our house that says, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Joshua said this on his deathbed as he speaks to the Israelites. It's the most famous part of our reading today, and sometimes it is coupled with the challenge that Joshua also made to the people, "Choose this day whom you will serve..."

For everything that is talked about in this lesson, after everything that God has done for us, it seems a shame that the most quoted part of this reading is the law, the part that seems like something WE can do. But God was active....

In a book of the Bible that is so full of killing and war, we get to the end and hear all of this horrific activity explained as the grace of God. The people saw it as grace.

Rachel Held Evans recently wrote, "With Scripture, we've been entrusted with some of the most powerful stories ever told. How we harness that power, whether for good or evil, oppression or liberation, changes everything."

And so today we have these words, references to powerful stories in the life of God and the chosen people of Israel..... How will we use them?

Here we are back in Shechem! Joshua has brought us here almost 700 years after God appeared to Abraham in this very place and promised, "To your offspring I will give this land." (v.12:7)

It took a while!! From Abraham and Sarah to Moses and Joshua – a single couple to over a million people.

The story of Joshua and the deliverance of God's people into the promised land is a glorious story of God remaining true to the covenant promise made to Abraham so long ago....

Joshua began speaking, "Thus says the Lord....

I took your father Abraham... and led him...; I gave him Isaac; I sent Moses and Aaron and I plagued Egypt; I brought your ancestors out of Egypt; Your eyes saw what I did to Egypt; I brought you to the land of the Amorites... I handed them over to you... I destroyed them before you; I rescued you from Balaam's hand (Numbers 22 and the talking donkey); the citizens of Jericho fought against you and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites... I handed them over to you; I sent the hornet ahead of you and drove out two kings; I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant....." (2x)

Where's the plaque for all of THAT?

Well, plaques on a wall are like old fashioned memes of today – you know those pithy sayings that show up on Facebook and elsewhere that often tell only part of the story?

Joshua goes on, "Now therefore (after all of that, which is basically 6 books worth of stuff that God has done for the people – some great and some terrible) revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness...." Sounds a lot like: people gathered and sent in the love of Christ! Our vision statement....

"But if you're unwilling.....," THEN you have a choice amongst the gods of other nations. But, the people say, "OKAY, WE WILL!!" "we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God"..... Joshua says, No you can't – But we will!! – But you can't!!

“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.²⁰ 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.”

In total, Joshua challenges the people 4 times to follow and serve God. 4...times! But the people promise....

This is us. This story is us.... What has God done for us?..... And, what do we in turn do?..... How do we serve?..... We have these mighty stories of God behind us, as Rachel says, they are powerful, they are not always pleasant or easy to hear. How do we compare this warrior God with the God of love and compassion and grace that we meet in Jesus?

Dr. Kathryn Schifferdecker, a professor of OT at Luther Seminary, says that when she teaches the book of Joshua to her students she has sometimes voiced that Joshua isn't her favorite book with all the violence attributed to God..... And earlier this year some of her students who are African-American and African said, “We don't see the problem with this story..... It's a victory tale..... God will give us what God has promised to give us. For those who are marginalized....., not privy to privilege....., these are stories of hope and promise that we can claim.”

So what has God promised us?..... This God of war and conquest, seen by some as legitimizing the oppression of peoples..... and seen by others as liberation and promise of release from oppression..... THIS same God.... came. In. Jesus.

And in Jesus we know God to be loving.... And willing to sacrifice himself..... HIMSELF.... To save his people.....once again...., by dying and rising..... Powerful WORD!

Jesus, YOUR LORD, has come to you....., giving you salvation that you didn't ask for, a life in him that you didn't work for, forgiveness that you haven't earned..... So that you also live in the kingdom of God for which you haven't labored, and the city of God that you have not built, and you eat of salvation in the fruit of the field and of the vine every week as you nestle up to the altar of the Lord at communion.

Your God is a gracious God....., showing steadfast love and forgiveness to every generation....., and sending you out into the world to love and serve God... by loving and serving your neighbor.

We say this a lot around here. A.... LOT....!!! We are learning about it specifically in adult Sunday school right now in the terms: justification and vocation (gathered and sent) justification – means that God has saved you; and vocation – means God has called and sent you into the world to be his hands and feet loving others of God's people whether they know God or not!!

How do we do it? How do we live into the calling that God has given to each one of us?..... We live.....

No matter where we are, God is with us..... So when we encounter a friend and share coffee and caring conversation, we are being God to them.

And when we encounter someone we don't know: and hold a door, load groceries in a trunk, make a quilt to send overseas, contribute to disaster relief and contribute to every day church offerings, defend a stranger who is being mistreated, THAT is God delivering that person just as God has promised to do.

Christian service....., our never changing vocation....., is manifested in our everyday lives in our everyday places.

Sometimes it's easy..... Sometimes it isn't.

But there's no comparison between the discomfort we might experience in serving, versus the discomfort the one who needed to be served might live every day.

"...we've been entrusted with some of the most powerful stories ever told. How we harness that power, whether for good or evil, oppression or liberation, changes everything."

Around here, we are: people.... (All kinds of people).... gathered and sent in the love of Christ.

With the powerful stories of Christ.... Amen.....