

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joshua 24:1, 2a, 14-18

The Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Then the people answered, “far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the more popular games shows on television during the 1960’s and 1970’s was *Let’s Make a Deal*. The host, Monty Hall, offered to buy or trade unusual household items which contestants brought with them for a chance to pick what was behind doors 1, 2, or 3. When the contestant chose to see what was behind a door, Monty offered to buy back their pick for \$1,000, \$2,000 or \$3,000. The contestants never knew how high Monty would go. The decision making was exciting and suspenseful. If the contestant chose the door, what would be behind it? Would it be new dining room furniture? A trip to Hawaii? Or would it be a mule wearing sunglasses and a sombrero?

Television viewers watched as contestants agonized over what to do. Should they take the money or go with door #1? Some of the contestants didn’t have any trouble making up their minds. They were very decisive. Others struggled, vacillating between the money and one of the doors. Eventually Monty would tell them that he needed a decision. They were going to have to make a decision and stick with it, no matter how tempting Monty might make it to change their minds. It was all in good fun. The show was reintroduced to daytime television in 2009 with host Wayne Brady.

Today, we’re not going to play a game of *Let’s Make a Deal*, but we are being asked to make a choice. The host isn’t Monty Hall, it’s the Lord himself. However, before we begin, please make note of this: He has already worked the miracle of faith in our hearts. We already know that we belong to him. Salvation is ours by grace through faith. However, we do still live on this earth. As long as we do, our new man is being asked to make a choice. The Lord is asking us to:

Make Your Commitment Today.

Whom will you serve?

- 1. Will you serve false gods?**
- 2. Will you serve the Lord?**

The setting for our text has the Children of Israel assembling together before Joshua. If you remember, Joshua was the man chosen by God to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. The land has been conquered and divided. Joshua knew that his time on earth was quickly coming to a close, so he

gathered the people one last time to encourage them, and to have them renew their covenant with their God.

As Joshua gathers the people together, he reminds them of all the wonderful things God had done for them. He reminded them of how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, how he parted the Red Sea, guided them in the wilderness and eventually brought them into the Promised Land. He also reminded them of how God had enabled them to defeat their enemies: the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, and Jebusites. And finally he reminded them of how he had given them a land, on which they did not toil, and cities they did not build, and olive groves they did not plant (v.13). Speaking through Joshua, God reminded them of how he had done it all!

However, before Joshua completed his rule, he gave the people one last bit of encouragement; one last bit of instruction. He commanded that they were to get rid of any false gods they may have had among their possessions or within their hearts. He said, **“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD”** (v.14).

Unfortunately, idolatry seemed to follow the Children of Israel throughout their history. We find that they were easily influenced by the heathen nations around them. We know for a fact that soon after being saved from the Egyptians, they worshiped a golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai. We also know that they had handmade idols in their homes, put away most of the time, but still readily accessible, especially if times got hard. So now, in his final address before the people, Joshua demanded a commitment. He wanted to know, would the people commit to their false gods who never did anything for them, or would they follow the God who had done everything for them? And just so that there wasn't any doubt, Joshua let them all know where he stood. He answered, **“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”** (v.15).

The same question is being asked of us today. Whom will we serve? Will we serve false gods or will we serve the Lord?

Now you would think the answer would be simple. You would think that everyone in here, without a moment's hesitation, would say that we will serve the Lord. Of course we will! By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit has led each and every one of us to believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Faith was created in our hearts at baptism. Faith was strengthened through our attendance in worship and instruction in the word of God. Those of us who have been confirmed remember when we stood before fellow believers and committed to remain faithful to God as long as we lived. Today I'm standing before people who recognize that God has done everything for us – absolutely everything!

Our answer is obvious isn't it? We commit to serve the Lord, because we would never, ever serve false gods. C'mon, we don't have any handmade idols tucked away in our closets at home, but readily accessible if the situation called for them. Of course not! Then again, if we're honest, do we not at times allow things to take a higher priority in our lives than God?

It has been said that if you want to know what is important to someone else, all you have to do is watch where they spend their time and their money. I believe that statement is true. Have you ever noticed how we always find time to do the things we want to do? If something is important to us, we will do whatever it takes to make it happen. For example, in the fall on Sunday afternoons, what do we do? We either attend or watch the Packer game on T.V. During the month of November, unless the world comes to an end, there are going to be hundreds of thousands of men and women out in the woods deer hunting.

Parents, who have children involved in sports or other after school programs, make it a priority to attend their child's events. Why? We attend because it is important to us and to our child. There are people who will take voluntary layoffs in order to take advantage of the sturgeon fishing season. And there are individuals who would never think of giving up their appointment to get their hair done at the salon.

You know what? There isn't anything wrong with that! I encourage you to find the time to do the things that are important to you. With that being said, is it possible that from time to time, we might allow what is important to us to become more important than our time with God?

We have been extremely blessed here at Trinity, haven't we? We are a congregation of 1226 souls. Last year, we averaged 542 people in worship a weekend. What a blessing! We also have been able to offer multiple Bible classes during the week. We're about to introduce Grow Groups later this fall. These are in-home Bible classes. We've field-tested them and they've proven to be a huge success. Keep your eyes open. They are coming soon! We've got people reading their Bibles, their *Meditations* and their *Forward in Christ* magazine. These are all tremendous blessings. We can see that we have people who have made the commitment to serve their Lord.

Yet with all these blessings, we are made aware of a few other sobering facts. The 542 who attend worship each week represent 44% of our congregation. Where's the other 56%? It means that over 1/2 of our congregation is not here on a given weekend. In fact, records show that in 1992, we had 31 of 52 weekly worship services with an attendance of over 600. So far in 2015 we have had 3. Although our membership has grown, our weekly worship attendance has not been keeping pace.

Why do you think that is? The only thing I can think of that makes any sense is that for some, being in worship is not a priority. Did you know that we currently have over 200 communicant members who haven't communed in at least three months? Some of them for several years? Of great concern is that the longer a person stays away, the weaker their faith may become. Isn't that incredible? We never allow ourselves to go a day without being fed food. Why is it that some allow themselves to go without spiritual food for great lengths of time? Is it possible the devil is working hard right here in this congregation? It's not only possible, it's a fact. He is right here among us, making what's behind this door or that door look more appealing than being within these doors.

Make no mistake about it; there are many similarities between us and the people of Joshua's day. Therefore his words are also meant for your ears and mine, "**Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve**" (v.15). In other words, -- it is time to look inside your head and heart and once again make your commitment to him. Make it today.

God's people who had taken possession of the Promised Land were faithful people. They listened to what Joshua had to say and made their commitment to serve the Lord. May we do the same.

Many years ago, you stood before this congregation, or one like it, and made the commitment to be faithful to God's word and the sacraments. You promised, upon the threat of death, to always be committed to your Lord. And by God's grace, many of you have held to your vows. Yet for some reason, there are others who seem to struggle.

Our goal as a congregation is to get everyone here trained and equipped to remain faithful to their Lord and to serve him only. Our vision is to have the entire membership connected constantly to the means of grace and to each other; and that we strive by all means possible to bring that same gospel to our community and our world. OK, so how do we do that? The answer is actually pretty simple. It involves relationships – people talking to people about Jesus.

Continue to be in worship where you have the opportunity to hear again and again of God's amazing grace for us lost sinners. Encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to join us. And as for those who are straying...our Shepherd's Committee has committed themselves to making contact with those who are straying. Our goal is to encourage; to let people know how much we care about them and their souls. We want to rebuild relationships and encourage each other to recommit to the Lord.

Continue to come to the Lord's Table. The sacrament of Holy Communion is God's gift to us. And it's personal. When we come forward with repentant hearts, we receive Christ's body and blood, together with the bread and wine, as Jesus' personal promise that our sins are forgiven. It is his personal promise to you and me that he gave his body and blood in payment for our sins. As a result of what Christ has done, we are once more considered to be holy in his sight.

And finally, be in the word. This weekend, in your mailboxes, you received a flyer outlining Bible study opportunities, when Sunday School begins, confirmation classes for the youth, and multiple opportunities for you to be in the word. We encourage you to come and to recommit yourselves. We encourage you to come and build on your relationships with your fellow Christians, and more importantly, to grow in your relationship with your Lord.

Our God is an awesome God. He reigns from heaven above. With wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God. He has done incredible things for us, and now he's asking for our response.

Will you recommit yourselves to him? I encourage you to make your commitment today. Let God's word be your guide. And may each of us be led to say, "**As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord**" (v.15).

Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.