

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 14
August 29, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz
We will serve the Lord

Then 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."

—Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

For those of you who were confirmed especially as youth when you were about 14 years old, what do you remember about your confirmation? What year and what month did it take place? Where was it? Was it out of state in places such as Nebraska or Minnesota? Or was it here in Arizona, maybe right here at Emmanuel Lutheran Church. For me it was in 1955, St. John's Lutheran Church in a very rural countryside about 30 miles southeast of Green Bay. An interesting tidbit comes from a sister in faith and member of our congregation, Kristine Sharp. She remembers back in the 1950's that she was confirmed in northern Illinois with a boy named Rodney. Rodney came from a broken and impoverished home. Kristine's parents gave him rides to confirmation class. As the day of confirmation approached, her parents purchased a suit for him so he would look special for confirmation Sunday.

Did you have a Bible passage for Confirmation and do you remember what it was? The sermon messages in some of our recent funeral services were based on the deceased confirmation passage. Do you remember the name of the pastor who confirmed you? Most important of all, do you remember the confirmation vow? Do you recall the commitment you made? It could all be summed up in that you promised to remain faithful to Jesus throughout your life. Today you are being asked to again commit yourself to the Lord as you did when you were confirmed.

The Bible section in front of this morning is something like a confirmation. We could call it a recommitment service. It took place about 1400 BC in the Promised Land of Israel. The leaders and elders of the people were being called upon to make a decision whether or not they were going to continue to serve the Lord. The speaker at the service was an old man, older than any of the pastors who confirmed you. His name was Joshua. He was well over 100 years old, maybe 110 years old, the age at which he died. He had to be at least twenty years older than any of the people to whom he was speaking. You see, he and a man by the name of Caleb were the only ones over the age of 20 when the Hebrew people left Egypt who would enter the Promised Land.

"Joshua summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God." Can you picture the scene? Perhaps it would be like today having a gathering of our senators, the judges from the Supreme Court, and the top brass generals. Joshua began his talk by reminding them of the many blessings that God had given them. They were the chosen people.

Joshua spoke about their forefathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They were chosen by God to be the ancestors of the Savior.

Joshua reminded them how they had been rescued from the slavery of Egypt

He spoke how God had them cross the Red Sea miraculously. Undoubtedly some of them at this meeting had experienced this as children or teenagers. How awed they had to have been.

Three months after the crossing of the Red Sea was when God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. That too had to be an awesome experience as the mountain shook with thunder and lightning like they had never seen before.

Joshua reminded them that the Lord protected them and provided for them in the wilderness for forty years. Likely he mentioned the daily manna for forty years.

Every Promise that God had made was kept.

As they were about to enter the Promised Land, God had the waters of the Jordan River divide.

Joshua reminded them how God had the walls of Jericho tumble down and how through the Lord the land was conquered. Marching around the walls of Jericho – and the walls came tumbling down

Joshua told them how God had blessed them. They moved into houses they had not built. They took over orchards and vineyards and olive groves that they had not planted.

But believe it or not, despite all these blessings from the gracious God, some of them were not faithful to the Lord. Perhaps it was indifference, perhaps it was putting themselves first, but surprisingly, in some cases it was even more than that. Some were worshipping false gods. I can imagine elderly Joshua looking at them in the eyes when 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.” Then Joshua told them, “You have to make up your mind what you are going to do.” “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.” Then came those wonderful and well-known words of Joshua as he told them, “Here is what I am going to do.” “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” It was time for the people to recommit themselves to the Lord

This is also a good time for us to recommit to serve the Lord. We can draw many applications and parallels today. It was but a few years ago that some of you made the confirmation vow to serve the Lord. For others of us it might have been 40, 50, 60, or even 70 years ago. This much is true. As the gracious Lord blessed those Hebrew people 3500 years ago, so has He blessed you and me. Let's look at some of these earthly blessings.

We live in America. What a blessing to be in a richly blessed nation. It is because of our prosperity and freedoms that millions want to come here.

A bounty of things. Just walk into any of our grocery stores and see the amazing amount and quality of food.

Our homes—much more comfortable than any of the Hebrew homes in the Promised Land and most homes in the world today. Think of our appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves, AC's and Heating systems, our cell phones and computers. Work and jobs and income, medical attention. Blessed with family.

All these things are being said not to make you feel guilty or ashamed but to make all of us realize how richly God has blessed us. As Psalm 23:5 says, “*Our Cup runneth over.*”

Spiritual Blessings—

The Old Testament people were given the promise that a Savior would come. We today have seen the fulfillment of that promises. The Lord Jesus Christ came, lived here for over 33 years. He kept the commandments in our place, suffered and died as our Substitute, rose victoriously. He blesses with forgiveness of our sins; He blesses us with eternal life. (God has brought us to faith. The complete Bible Born into Christian family Baptism Taught God's Word Sunday School, Lutheran Elementary School, Bible Classes, Pastors and Teachers Communion Congregations, church buildings. Your talents and gifts.)

The question is, Have you remained faithful? Things have changed since you made that confirmation vow. You are older, some of you are much older. You have left that childhood home; many of you have families of your own. Things have changed radically in the spiritual world of our country. Sin has always been present but the spiritual climate is different from what it was in the 50's and 60's. Christianity has waned. There is an average of 2500 abortions per day in the USA. Scams are daily. Adulteries and living together without marriage are condoned. A woman in our congregation reported sadly that her grandchild in kindergarten has a book from his school titled “My Two Moms and Me.” You might think this school is on the east coast or the west coast but it is in Flagstaff. Harvard University has employed an atheist as a chaplain.

But the question today is not about some people out there but it is about you. Will you continue to serve the Lord? I realize the fact that you are in church this morning and worshipping the Lord Jesus shows you are faithful. However, have you become a bit lax in your religious life or somewhat indifferent? Is your heart really in it or you are just going through the motions? Have you become sloppy with sin and careless with the hurtful words coming out of your mouth? Are your goals in life centered not so much on Christ but on self, money, pleasure? Are you taking the Lord's grace and forgiveness for granted and not really appreciating them? Would you characterize your spiritual life as being lukewarm? Remember these words spoken by Jesus, “*I know your deeds, that you are*

neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16)

It's time for each to examine self. That's what the Lord wants us to do. And once again we need to rejoice in all the blessings from the gracious Lord. We need to thank Him for his love and His forgiveness.

And it is a good time to recommit ourselves to serving the Lord. The people at Joshua's time did recommit themselves to the Lord. Here is what they said, "*We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.*" Will you also make that promise? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.