

**Choose THIS Day!
Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-15
Don Lincoln**

Our nation has just come through the most difficult election I can recall. In general terms, about half the country is at least OK with, or even thrilled by the outcome; and the other half is everything from not OK to absolutely outraged or frightened beyond belief. Each side has prophesied national catastrophe should the other party's candidate be elected.

Those words I just spoke are from my sermon on November 13, 2016 – the Sunday after the Presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

I also looked back at my sermon following the 2008 election of Barack Obama. And found in each of those sermons, following those two elections, that I acknowledged that some people wept for joy, and some people simply wept. After each election some neighbors were dancing, while other neighbors went to sleep angry, frightened, and filled with despair.

As the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

But early last week, historian and author John Meacham said he believed this presidential election would be the most significant election since the election in 1932 or even 1860. I wonder, frankly, if people in 1932 knew at the time how significant the election of FDR would actually be, or in 1860 how significant it would be to elect Abraham Lincoln?

This election was significant for me – in a very personal way. I wrote this sermon on Wednesday and recorded it at 8:30 Thursday morning. (I'm not live if you don't know it!) I did that because I spent the previous week vacationing in the Outer Banks, and unfortunately – after planning that vacation some time ago – North Carolina was put on the Pennsylvania state quarantine list. I feel absolutely fine – but I'm quarantined for 14 days – so I had to record today's message. The last time I intentionally recorded a sermon for Westminster was in December of 1999 – for your Pastor Nominating Search Committee!

For months I've pondered preaching the Sunday after this election. When I realized I would have to quarantine and record, I was not happy – in fact, very UNHAPPY. But frankly, now I feel fortunate. Because, while writing and preaching this sermon, I have no clue who was elected. And, in the deepest sense – at least for the sake and heart of this sermon – I really don't care. Because the call of God upon all of our lives is still the same. No matter who is president.

Every follower of Jesus has an allegiance that supersedes red or blue, a higher allegiance than Democrat or Republican, and no matter who wins, it is that allegiance which informs who you and I are, and how it is we should continue to seek to influence the nation as citizens. So

what a gift it was today, to have Joshua 24 as one of the lectionary texts. “Choose THIS day whom you will serve! But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord.”

If we had read all of the 24th chapter of Joshua, we would have heard Joshua retell the story of Genesis – and the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah. And the story of a God who refuses to write off wounded, dysfunctional families.¹

Next Joshua retells the Exodus story. It’s the story of a God who visits Israel and works through Moses and Aaron to set wrongs right; a God who challenges evil systems, who denounces injustice, and who does miracles like parting seas. It is a tale of deliverance and survival, and a tale about a God who cannot stay away from His people when they are being victimized.

Finally Joshua tells his own story. Reminds the people how God led them out of the wilderness, across the Jordan River into the lush land of Canaan – the Promised Land.

But after that history lesson, Joshua then comes to the meat of his sermon. “Now,” he begins, meaning perhaps “after all that I have reminded you of,” “Revere the Lord; and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods whom your ancestors served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.” Then without even taking a breath, Joshua holds up the possibility, however ludicrous it may sound, that these people may decide not to worship God even in the face of the overwhelming evidence of who God has been for them.

Why does Joshua go there? Because Joshua knows the people are simply not to be trusted! They may claim belief, but Joshua knows all too well that **talk is cheap and obedience is costly**. Joshua knows the people's claims to obey God will again and again be tested throughout Israel's subsequent history.²

So what about you and me? The stone Joshua placed at Shechem still stands as witness against all those who profess belief and service in the LORD, but too often turn to the gods beyond the river. The gods who are ever ready to offer things to us too beautiful, too enticing, or too much to our own liking or personal benefit to pass up.

Israel has been freed from slavery – but their freedom is not for themselves, it is freedom to serve and to be obedient to God and the world they are called to love. So it is with you and me. We have been freed from the bondage of our sin by the work of in Jesus Christ, but we have been freed for a purpose. Choose this day whom you will serve – the God who delivered you from bondage – your own bondage to your sin and to yourself – or will you serve some other God more to your liking. A God who won’t mess with you too much.

Unlike so many of the choices you and I make, this choice matters. It’s not like choosing a flavor of gelato, or what to watch next on Netflix. This is about making up our minds about where our center is; about what direction we will travel; where our loyalties lie. Everything is at stake in this decision.³

“As for me and my household we will serve the LORD.” Not my interpretation of the LORD, not the LORD who loves MY agenda, but the LORD whose agenda for me and the world supersedes any other agenda known to humankind.

Our task is to be obedient all our lives to the Will of God – which is Love for the world. And therein lies the difference between being good for nothing and good for something. Between religion for show and religion for real. Between personal spirituality that dedicates itself to achieving private sanctification – and prophetic spirituality, which requires that we each be such a prophetic presence of God’s desire for all humanity that our corner of the world becomes a better place because you and I have been there.⁴

So – whoever was elected, the one thing you and I DO know is God’s intention for us as followers of Jesus remains unchanged. God’s expectations of us, and the guidelines by which you and I conduct ourselves as disciples in this world are not changed by political movements or moments of transition in human history.

Our first allegiance is to Jesus Christ and Him alone. No political agenda or party holds our first call. Jesus is LORD. And by Him you and I are called to the **simplest – and most challenging** – of tasks, just as we always have been. As the prophet Micah put it, to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Whatever else is happening, you and I must still be about the business of loving our neighbors and our enemies alike – praying for those with whom we disagree, seeing Jesus in the ones who don’t resemble us or our views.

The church – and you and I – are to speak the Gospel truth to power; truth to culture; truth to systems and individuals alike. We are to see the image of God in all people, which means sexism, racism and bigotry have no place in the kingdom Jesus is ushering in. Knowing that God ordains the authorities for the welfare of the city, we are to remind those in power that **the welfare of all matters**, and that elitism, ignoring the rule of law, protecting the privileges of the few are not signs of the Kingdom of God in our midst either.

So Friends, tomorrow and every day thereafter, let us all – each and every one – be a source of hope and healing – no matter what.

- No matter who wins, our hospitals will be teeming with patients ill with COVID-19 and other ailments. **Heal the sick.**
- No matter who wins, prisons will be overcrowded. **Visit the prisoner.**
- No matter who wins, there will be racial, socioeconomic and xenophobic injustice. **Liberate the oppressed.**
- No matter who wins, there will be food insecurity at home and around the world. **Feed the hungry.**

- No matter who wins, there will be makeshift tents under bridges in every city around the world. **Shelter the homeless.**
- No matter who wins, our planet will continue to gasp for breath. **Care for creation.**
- No matter who wins, there will be employed and unemployed people struggling to make ends meet. **Give to the needy.**
- No matter who wins, there will be people shivering in the cold. **Clothe them.**
- No matter who wins, there will be widowers, widows and orphans. **Comfort them.**
- No matter who wins, the promise and renewal of Advent is just around the corner. **Share the Good News.**
- No matter who wins, be joyful, resilient and strong. **Take care of yourself.**
- There are no winners and losers when our only measure of success is that all creation may flourish. We all lose or we all win together, no matter what.⁵

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage.
 Hold fast to what is good. Render unto no one evil for evil.
 Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted.
 Honor all people. Love and serve the Lord. You and your household.

May it be so. Amen.

- ¹ Bill Enright, "*Betting Your Life on God*," sermon at Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, IN; September 17, 2000.
- ² John Holbert, Patheos, "*Whom Will You Choose?*" Reflections on Joshua 24 – November 01, 2011.
- ³ Jim Somerville, "*Choose This Day And Every Day*," sermon preached November 12, 2017.
- ⁴ Joan Chittister, remarks from Richard Rohr's "*Center for Action and Contemplation*," November 2, 2020.
- ⁵ Dr David Rowe, interim president of Lancaster Theological Seminary; posted November 2, 2020 by Rev. Charlie Gross on Presbyterian Leaders Facebook page.