

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18**My House Will Serve The LORD**

- 1) That's a confession created by the LORD's grace
- 2) That's a commitment preserved by the LORD's word

Pentecost 14 B

506, 474, 482 (1), 355, 347

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St. John Lutheran Church - Frankenmuth, Michigan

1Then 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. 2Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 14"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 19But 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." 16Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! 17It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our forefathers 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. 18And 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.”

Prayer: “Then here will I and mine today A solemn promise make and say: though all the world forsake his Word, I and my house will serve the Lord!” (CW 506:5).

Introduction: Decisions...decisions. Early in life, we groom our children to make their own decisions. When they are young such decisions aren't all that important. “What color do you want to paint your room...blue or green?” But as they become older, we teach them that some decisions can have *lasting* and even *permanent* consequences: “Make sure you choose the right person to marry as your life partner and soul mate.”

Then, there are other crucial decisions that come in life: “Do I take the risk of having complicated surgery? Do I undergo chemo therapy and radiation?” Truly, those types of decisions can mean the difference between *life* and *death*.

But there's a most important decision that makes the difference between *eternal life* and *death*. A number of years ago with a class of over 20 students at a former congregation, I preached on the gospel lesson before us today. At the beginning of the sermon, I emphasized how statics support this “hard” to hear and sad reality: within a few years after our young teens make their confirmation vows to remain faithful to the Lord for the rest of their lives, over 50% of them fall away from Jesus. What about you? What will you do?

When Jesus proclaimed that He was the Bread of Life who came down from heaven, and as the true God-man is the only way to heaven, those following him responded, “*This is a hard*

teaching. Who can accept it?” (John 6:60). Of course, no one can “*accept*” Jesus—as Luther wrote in his explanation to the Third Article—by “his own thinking or choosing.” Jesus stresses about the spiritually dead: “...*no one can come to me unless the Father has drawn him*” (6:65).

But we also know that God in His grace brought us to faith through the working of the Holy Spirit either by Baptism or through the word. But why is it that some fall away from Jesus? It’s because they starve themselves spiritually; quit hearing God’s word, the means by which the Holy Spirit keeps us in the true faith. John records how after hearing Jesus’ “*hard*” teaching, “*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him*” (John 6:66). Jesus then asked his disciples, believers like you and me this most eternally important question: “*You do not want to leave too, do you?*” (6:67) Peter answered, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God*” (6:68).

After completing their 40 years of wilderness wandering, the LORD brought the people of Israel to their promised land. That’s when Joshua assembled “*all*” the people together, and asked them to reaffirm their allegiance to the LORD, and gave his personal confession of what he and his family intended to do—which serves as an example for us to confess and commit to:

“My House Will Serve The LORD”

- 1) That’s a confession created by the LORD’s grace (v.1)
 - A. Shechem is in the center of Canaan; the first place where Abraham settled after obeying the LORD’s command to “*leave*

his native land and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12)—at age 75! At Shechem the LORD promised him: “*To your offspring I will give this land” (12:7).*

1. There Abraham built an altar to worship the LORD, who soon would promise him and his barren wife Sarah a son (**Genesis 15, 18, 21**). What grace!

2. What was so significant about this promise of a promised land? It wasn't merely that God made that promise happen when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90. Rather, it was that through Abraham's descendants that the LORD would send a Savior to make the Promised Lands of heaven a reality to all believers who had the same faith in this Savior-God as Abraham—Abraham is the “*father of all believers*” (**Romans 4:16**).

B. Joshua, generations later, as his last official act as general of God's people, reminds them of how the LORD preserved them to keep His promise of the Savior, brought them to this land. Now he urges the people to reaffirm their promise to the LORD that they believe this truth.

1. Who was Joshua (lived up to his name: “Jehovah [the LORD of ‘*free and faithful grace*’ is salvation”)? He and Caleb were the only spies demonstrating their trust in the LORD keeping His promise to give the Israelites this promised land (**Numbers 13**).

2. Now, Joshua acts as prophet of God stating, “*This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says...*” (v.2). Then, Joshua focuses on choice portions of Israel's history that punctuate the LORD's undeserved love and powerful acts of grace.

Appropriation: Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus:

- Joshua speaks to us this day: “*Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 19But 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*” (vv.14-18). Idolatry? Wait a minute...I don’t bow down to Buddha. But remember the First Commandment speaks about “open idolatry” and “closed idolatry”—idols perhaps invisible to people, but very visible to God. Have we kept or do we ALWAYS keep the First Commandment perfectly? Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there your hearts will be*” (Matthew 6:21) —do we give God our first fruits of the leftovers? Do we trust God’s promise of forgiving love in Jesus? What about the Third Commandment? Do we worship God regularly and faithfully, feeding ourselves with the bread of His word and sacrament, the only life-lines that keep us connected to Jesus and spiritually fed? Robert De Niro would say to Joshua—and so do we—“Are you talkin to me?” Yes, God is talking to us about our at times mixed up priorities and imperfect trust.
- But in His grace—which is truly a “*hard*” teaching—God choose us as the LORD did Abraham turning him from idolatry to faith. So, too, God saved us “*not because of the*

righteousness things we have done, but because of his mercy” (**Titus 3:4**): Jesus’ **perfect life** of trust, **sacrifice & resurrection**.

Transition: St. Paul summarized the LORD’s saving grace this way: **Ephesians 2:8-10**. We truly are God’s workmanship (the LORD gets all the credit) to “live for Him.” No wonder Joshua stated: “*My house will serve the LORD!*”

2) That’s a commitment preserved by the LORD’s word.

A. The LORD had preserved Israel throughout HIStory...Joshua says...

1. “*Fear*” and *serve*” Him = respect. Consider: the sending of Moses and Aaron to prepare for Israel’s release from Egypt (**Exodus 3:10; 4:14-16**); the ten plagues (**Exodus 7-11**); the miracle when the LORD turned a section of the Red Sea into a corridor of dry land (**Exodus 14**); the LORD’s care for his often-grumbling people during the 40 long desert/wilderness wandering years (**Exodus 15-Numbers 21**)

2. The people in faith and commitment did rise up to faithfulness in the LORD.

B. The LORD’s preserves us spiritually in such a commitment through Jesus...Jesus reminds...

1. His promise of spiritual deliverance to THE Promised Land.

2. His promise to “keeps us in the one true faith” through His eternal life lines: Means of Grace (word and sacrament).

Appropriation: Dear beloved by Jesus:

- God demands our undivided allegiance. As His people, we do stand in awe of him based on WHAT He has done for us in Jesus. As the psalmist writes, “*But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared*” (**Psalm 130:4**). God’s forgiveness produces the opposite of dread: it erases guilt; it gives a quiet confidence in trials; it provides the “*peace of God that goes beyond understanding*” (**Philippians 4:7**)

Conclusion: Dear fellow redeemed: Decisions...decisions. The hymn writer says of the Christian’s walk with God and the decisions we face in life: “I walk in danger all the way” (**CW 431**). On this side of eternity, we will continue to “*fight the good fight of the Christian faith*” (**2 Timothy 4:6-8**). But because of Jesus, the Bread of Life, and as we feed on His word, our “daily bread,” the Holy Spirit will keep “standing up for Jesus” confessing and committing with Joshua and all God’s faithful people: “*My house will serve the LORD!*”