Pentecost 14/School Opening — Joshua 245:1,2 14-18
August 29, 2021 — 515-466-511/508-510

"We Too Will Serve the LORD!"
I. In grateful response to His goodness.
II. With total commitment to God.

Dear Christian friends,

This week's **Scripture readings** all deal with what today is a DIRTY WORD – commitment – and especially commitment TO GOD. Commitment involves energy and effort. Commitment can mean inconveniences and **sacrifices**. People don't want that. They **don't want** to be TIED DOWN. They want their space and FREEDOM. If things get tough then IT'S TIME to bail out instead of BUCKLE DOWN and work things out.

HOW REFRESHING to hear Joshua say, ***"But as for me and my house — we will serve the LORD!"*** AND to hear the Israelites respond, ***"We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God!"*** Today we echo them, "WE TOO WILL SERVE THE LORD!" We **too will serve** the LORD 1)in grateful response to **His goodness** and 2)with total commitment to God.

I. In grateful response to His goodness.

These verses take us to THE END of Joshua's life. WHAT A LIFE he had had! Joshua had been born a slave in Egypt. He had lived through the **plagues** God had sent on Egypt. He had been a part of the **exodus** – had crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. Joshua was the ONLY ONE LEFT from those days. **In the wilderness** Joshua had served as Moses' trusted aide. **When Moses died** God made Joshua the leader of the Israelites. **Under Joshua** the Israelites had conquered the Promised Land of Canaan. NOW it was time for Joshua to say good-bye to the people he LOVED and HAD SERVED **so well**.

Right before these verses Joshua had REMINDED the Israelites of **all that God had done** for them. He talked about how God had called Abraham and promised him this land of Canaan. He **talked** about how God had sent Moses and Aaron **to deliver** His people – how God had sent those plagues on Egypt and led Israel out **in freedom**. Joshua recalled the conquest of Canaan – how God had given them VICTORY AFTER VICTORY. Joshua had finished up by saying, ***"So (He) has given you a land for which you did not labor. (He) gave you cities that you did not build. (He) gave you vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant."***

For Joshua none of this was BORING REPETITION. This was the foundation of THEIR RELATIONSHIP with God. Before Joshua **talked to them** about THEIR COMMITMENT to God Joshua reviewed GOD'S COMMITMENT to them. Their commitment to **serving God** was to be a GRATEFUL RESPONSE to the **grace** and **goodness** God had first shown them.

Before we say, ***"We too will serve the LORD!"*** let's review the facts of **God's grace** and **goodness** to us. You know these facts WELL – you've seen these sights SO MANY TIMES before but this is not boring repetition! Come again to Bethlehem and **kneel** before the manger. That Baby is the **eternal Son** of God made flesh. Come and watch Jesus live a **life perfect** in every way – perfect love, trust, obedience. Hear Jesus say, "YOU TAKE all the credit for My life and I'LL TAKE the punishment for all your sins." Come with me to Calvary and stand at the cross. Do you see what's happening? The **sinless**, ***"beloved Son"*** of God is dying as the INNOCENT LAMB of God all to ***"take away the sin of the world."*** Rejoice as Jesus shouts, ***"It is finished!" "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*** Come with me to Jesus' empty grave and hear Him promise, ***"Because I live, you shall live also."*** Come with me to the Mount of

Ascension and recall Jesus saying, ***"In My Father's house are many mansions. I go and prepare a place for you."***

We heard Peter say in the gospel reading, ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."*** WHERE ELSE can we find God's love - forgiveness for all our sins – eternal life in heaven the moment we die? **Where else** can we find our identity – our **strength** – comfort – **peace**? It's ALL RIGHT HERE in **Jesus crucified** and risen. PARENTS, to teach your children EVERYTHING BUT Jesus is to **teach them** how to live and THEN DIE. **To teach** them God's Word is to teach them to live – and THEN LIVE FOREVER in heaven!

In grateful response to God's **grace** and **goodness** we also say, ***"We too will serve the LORD!"***

II. With total commitment to God.

Joshua was concerned that the Israelites would make this promise WITHOUT FIRST THINKING it through. So he took the time to EXPLAIN it to them. ***"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him wholeheartedly and faithfully. Remove the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."*** Serving the Lord calls for TOTAL – NOTHING held back – commitment.

To SERVE the Lord is to ***"fear"*** Him. This fear is not dreading God or being afraid of Him but STANDING IN AWE OF God – BEING OVERWHELMED by all God has done for us. The psalmist wrote, ***"But with You there is forgiveness, THEREFORE You are feared." "Fearing"*** God is living every moment of our lives with REVERENCE and RESPECT for God. This God is MY God – my SAVIOR God! Think of Joseph when he was tempted to **commit adultery** with Potiphar's wife. He didn't say, "This could COST ME my job" – "I might LOSE MY HEAD." Joseph met that temptation with the ***"fear"*** of God – ***"How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against (my) God?"***

Joshua explains, ***"Serve Him wholeheartedly and faithfully."*** It almost sounds stupid saying it but to ***"serve"*** is TO DO what God says. To say, ***"we will serve the LORD"*** is to say God is the BOSS and we are **His servants** here to do **whatever** God says.

The Hebrew word for ***"serve"*** also means to **worship**. ***"Serving"*** God begins with worshiping God. STAYING FOCUSED on what God has all done for us and promised to us KEEPS US COMMITTED to ***"serving"*** Him ***"wholeheartedly and faithfully."*** **If** we don't know WHAT GOD SAYS we won't know WHAT TO BELIEVE or what God wants. At the heart of serving God is the study of His Word – at home – in church – in Bible class, etc.

At the same time **worship** is not just something we DO FOR AN HOUR on Sunday mornings. **Worship** is our DAILY way of life. Paul told the Roman Christians, ***"I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice — holy and pleasing to God — which is your appropriate worship. Do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you test and approve what is the will of God."*** Or there's Paul saying, ***"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you so, do it all for the glory of God."***

Do you see what that HAS TO SAY about **your life**? What is the PURPOSE of an education? Is it **simply** to enable you to get a good-paying job – to be a PRODUCTIVE and **contributing member** of society? The **purpose** of an education is to develop the talents God has given us to be used FOR HIS GLORY and THE GOOD of others.

Do you see what this has to say about your JOB? Is your job simply a means to MAKE MONEY – or to worship and serve your Savior by providing for your **family** and **the spread** of the gospel? **Children**, as you do your **homework** and **study** this year – don't do it just to PASS or to KEEP YOUR

TEACHERS and **parents** off your back. Faithfully doing your schoolwork is a way for you to WORSHIP and SERVE your Savior.

Do that ***"wholeheartedly and faithfully."*** We're talking commitment – TOTAL commitment - **not** CONVENIENCE. **Serving** God is not a matter of IF WE FEEL like it or HAVE THE TIME. There can be no compromising – **although** people will try that. Many want to PICK AND CHOOSE what they will believe or how far they will **go in obeying** God. They want God around when they NEED Him but **otherwise** God should LEAVE THEM ALONE and not interfere in their lives. Read the OT. The Israelites tried doing that but God wouldn't let them GET AWAY with it. The First Commandment demands SUCH TOTAL COMMITMENT to God – that we "fear love and trust in God ABOVE ALL things."

Joshua continued. ***"Remove/throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped."*** We may not have idols like **Baal** and **Dagon** or a ***"golden calf"*** vying with God for our hearts. But there are STILL PLENTY of **false gods** around who would love to take GOD'S PLACE in our hearts. Will you worship at the ALTAR OF MONEY or **sports**? Will you job or toys or PERSONAL COMFORT be the most important things in your life? Will you bow down to the MOST POPULAR idol of all – that one we see in the mirror every day – the GOD OF SELF? "I'll do what I want and nobody **can tell me** how to live my life!" Will you serve the god of POPULAR OPINION – "everybody else isa doing it so it must be OK"?

Joshua had MADE HIS CHOICE. ***"But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*** Joshua was willing to GO IT ALONE if needed – **although** he really wouldn't be alone. HIS GOD would be there with him **every step of the way. Joshua was also** taking the lead for his family. As a husband and father Joshua had the GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY for the spiritual well-being of his family. **Joshua knew** he couldn't keep his family from the EVIL INFLUENCES and TEMPTATIONS of the world around them. But he could prepare them for it by teaching them God's Word AND with his own personal example of a **God-centered** life. Spending eternity with his family in heaven with their Savior was more important to Joshua **than** his children being successful or popular in the world. God's Word and the godly example of **faith in the Savior** were the greatest gifts Joshua could PASS ON to his children and grandchildren. That hasn't changed any over the centuries!

As God's people who have also experienced God's **grace** and **goodness** we today recommit ourselves to ***"serving"*** the Lord. We join Joshua and the Israelites in saying, ***"We (too) will serve the LORD!"*** God help us to do just that! Amen.

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