

Pentecost 13, August 22, 2021 (Jo 6:56-69; Josh 24:1-2a,14-18; Ps 34:15-22)

The idea of *servicing* is at the root of all the readings today—but *look who's servicing!* This is the third week we've had Psalm 34 as our call to worship, and it's full of the ways God serves his people. Listen:

- **I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears (v.4).**
- **The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them (v. 7).**
- **Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are those who take refuge in him (v. 8). . . .**
- **Those who fear him lack nothing. . . . Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing (vv. 9-10).**
- **The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry (v. 15).**
- **The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit (v. 18).**
- **The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him (v. 22).** – I especially like this verse, because it confirms my rock-solid faith that God doesn't turn anyone away. *Everyone* who seeks refuge in him is welcomed.

The entire Bible *abounds* with evidence of God's tender loving care for his creation. God created human beings for himself: **in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.** And he'll do anything—*anything*—to save them! He'll even give himself up to death for our sake.

The reading from Joshua contains a popular verse, one you'll find in many kitchens, over hearths, on welcome mats, on cards: **As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**

The context is important here, as always. After God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. Now Moses is dead, and Joshua has led the people into the Promised Land, a land literally **flowing with milk and honey.**

Joshua is about to die, and he urges the people to hear and obey his final words. ***Throw away the false idols your forefathers worshiped before God rescued them***, he says.

We have a hard time understanding this command, because we don't usually worship *objects*. At least not the way they were worshiped in the Old Testament. The pagan peoples literally worshiped idols carved in the vague shape of humans.

They carried them in pouches around their necks, buried them at the doors of their homes, propped them up in prominent places so they could be easily seen and worshiped.

They believed these idols, made by human hands, were able to give them the blessings they desired: rain, harvest, fertility, sons instead of daughters, strength, growth—whatever they prayed for.

Joshua reminds the people they now belong to the one God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God who delivered them from bondage in Egypt and led them into the Promised Land. They now owe their allegiance and their *worship* only to this one God!

I've shared this memory with some of you. Back in the 1980's in Chico, we had a stewardship speaker at Faith Lutheran Church.

He challenged us to look at our checkbooks, saying that whatever we wrote the most checks for was, basically, our *god*. Well, Paul was in kindergarten, and every Sunday on the way home from church we'd stop at Chuck E. Cheese. I would read and he'd play, and then we'd share a pizza before going home for naps.

That year I wrote more checks to Chuck E. Cheese than anyone or anything else. I certainly didn't *worship* that place! But you can see the idea behind the thought.

Where your treasure is, there your heart is also, said Jesus. This isn't a stewardship sermon, but rather an invitation to look at how you worship. Where do you spend the largest part of your time? Your money? Where is your heart, really?

Joshua knew if the people worshiped their foreign gods, they couldn't give their entire allegiance—body, mind, and spirit—to the One God of their fathers. He invited them to be intentional about setting their priorities—about faithfully worshiping and *servicing* the God who so faithfully served *them*.

Today we have the last of the *bread of life* texts. Five weeks is a long time to preach on this one subject. In many ways it's the basis of our faith and worship, but there's only so much you can say about it.

In the end, the mystery of holy communion is just that: mystery. We believe Christ is truly present when we receive the sacrament. We receive his true body and true blood in the bread and the wine.

Jesus has promised himself, and life forever, to all who eat and believe. We claim that promise for ourselves. That's what faith is: trusting in the mystery. We know we can trust the promises of God, because God has always been faithful to those who believe.

I wanted to say "The End" there, but there's one more piece of this mysterious faith.

During these five weeks of bread-of-life teachings, first the crowds and now the disciples have grumbled and complained about the **hard words** of Jesus. Many have turned and walked away, unable to cope with something too strange, too difficult to understand.

At the end of today's gospel Jesus turns to the Twelve. Can't you just hear the discouragement in his voice? **You aren't going to leave too, are you?**

Peter the Rock, Peter the Outspoken—Peter who would end up denying Jesus three times—Peter speaks for all of them, and also for us today: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.** Let's sing the *Alleluia* once more (LBW p. 83).

Thanks be to God!