

In This House, We Serve the Lord!

A sermon based on Joshua 24:15.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Kristen, are you a little nervous? Is it the memory work? It always is. And, don't worry, I know you'll do great! But I would contend what might be a bigger deal is what's going to happen right before that, because Kristen, you're going to have some important decisions to make.

And they're nowhere near as simple as when you were younger...like what cartoons to watch...shorts or long pants...what kind of Happy Meal did I want...which might have been a big deal then but in hindsight, really not. In a short time, though, you're going to have the opportunity to confess your faith (let these believers know what you believe), and you're going to be asked to make some decision...if you agree with what this church believes and teaches...if you want to become a part of this church family...if you are going to actively support the work and the mission of this congregation...not easy decisions to make...or, rather...to really mean and live.

You see, in a country where 50-80% of the youth (depends on which article you're reading) are leaving churches between confirmation and high school graduation ages...where the same kind of numbers are disassociating themselves from a church family (with a decline in worship attendance...spotty, if any Bible Class participation, strong tendency to avoid becoming active in church life and church work)...odds are against you that you'll be able to keep these vows.

Ask anyone here how hard it is...we've all been there. We have the same outside influences feeding us lies, seducing us away from Jesus...we have the same sinful nature that will put out all the stops to prevent us from making right and godly choices. We also have the same LORD, our loving Savior, who has, who continues to show his grace to us day after day.

You will have the chance to choose this day whom you will serve. Friends, today you will be reminded of whom you serve...you'll have the chance to recommit yourself to him. Because, to be clear, in this house, we serve the Lord.

Now, your confirmation verse comes from a section of Scripture where God's chosen leader, Joshua, was in the midst of giving a farewell sermon to the Israelites, but I'd like to think of this as being sort of a confirmation for the people as well.

It's the end of a beginning for the Israelites. God had used Joshua to faithfully lead his people into the Promised Land and settle them there. The era of being nomads led by God's grace was coming to an end. They were home.

But it was also the beginning of the end for the people. Joshua was about to leave them (and go to be with the saints in heaven). Their formal training was over. Now, it was time for them to live. Now, they had a decision to make.

Now, let's get this notion right out of the way...Joshua wasn't asking them to make a decision for Jesus...to decide whether they were going to believe in God or not.

No, think about his audience. Joshua is here calling for a choice from people who already own the gift of faith from the Lord. They can either choose to abandon the Lord (and go their own sinful way) or, by the power of the Spirit already given to them, they could confirm their God-given faith and renew the covenant he put in place. The decision? Are you going to serve God from here on out, or, if that seems undesirable to you, are you going to serve self?

And then he gave his answer, Kristen, your confirmation verse, ***“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”***

Now, some of you might think this verse is a little weird. Where do you typically see this verse? In houses; a lot of newlywed couples get it for a wedding gift...a great reminder Jesus is the master of the house...just as he’s the master of our lives.

But, why a confirmation verse? It’s a reminder (especially to you, Kristen, but to everyone else here, too) that you are part of a larger family who loves you, who cares about you, who supports you, even if they don’t know a lot about you. And many of us have been in the same place where you will be standing, taking a stand, making a confession, making a commitment, choosing whom we will serve.

And Joshua’s choice is the same choice this household of believers has made. In this house...in this church...in this congregation...in this family, we serve the Lord.

Now, as I said earlier, it’s going to be easy to make your decision...to speak your confirmation vows. I mean, I’ll be asking the questions and all you have to do is give the answer “I do” or “I do, and I ask God to help me.” Not difficult, right.

Even the Israelites here, after Joshua got done putting the two choices before them...either serve the Lord, or if doing that seems undesirable to you (or literally, if following God’s commands seems evil or wicked to you)...if that’s the case, serve other gods...serve yourselves...with those two choices, the Israelites knew the obvious answer, ***“We too will serve the LORD.”***

And you know what Joshua said next? ***“You are not able to serve the LORD.”*** Wait! What?!?! Joshua knew the hearts of the people, that no matter how eager they were at that moment to pledge their allegiance and their lives to complete service to God, they would be just as eager to turn away from God and turn to idols when it seemed favorable to them.

Saying the words...making these promises...that’s easy. Actually meaning them and then living out your confirmation vows is not. Again, just ask anyone else here because we’re right there with you. Listen to some of the vows you’ll be asked to make (and that you’ve made): ***“Do you intend to continue steadfast in [the teachings of God’s Word] and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it? Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God’s Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as long as you live?”***

This past week, the recruitment director from Michigan Lutheran Seminary (one of our synod-owned high schools) came and presented to our Catechism families...a great option for any parents who are wanting a Christian education for their children or for children who are thinking of becoming a pastor or teacher. He mentioned, with MLS being like a boarding school (because a large percentage of the students live in dorms, they’re able to set up policies, rules, requirements to curb the students’

behavior. But they still can't police everything, like cellphone usage, what they're watching on Netflix, where they're always driving to.

I went to an area Lutheran High School (a high school supported by the WELS churches in the area). Amongst the student population, there was cheating, theft, cussing, disrespect shown to teachers, violence, sex, drinking, drug use, young women not using the best Christian judgment in the way they dress, young men not using the best Christian judgment in how they react, gossip, bullying, same as in any public high school. At other area Lutheran high schools, I've heard homosexuality, unwanted pregnancies, promiscuity between teachers and students or the other way around.

This is not meant to scare you away from Christian education (it's certainly not a regular occurrence; my guess is this is on a much smaller scale compared to public schools), but those are the realities of what you're facing today. We're not immune. And it'd be naïve for any of us here to assume you haven't been exposed to a majority of that already, even just coming out of middle school.

You're not being asked to decide to believe in Jesus. He's made that decision for you. Now he's asking you to choose to follow him...to conform your entire life to his teachings, to be faithful to his Word, to be faithful to God in everything, even if doing so means suffering and even death as a result. What's your choice?

And God gives a reality check, ***"You are not able to serve the LORD."*** You are not able to serve me. Same as the rest of us. In this house, we have committed to serve the Lord...but we don't...not on our own...not always. I mean, for all of us, it should be obvious. Serving the Lord should never seem undesirable or wicked. But we know, we've seen, we've experienced how human nature, the pressures of society, and the great deceiver, Satan, are hard at work to blur the obvious choices.

There are many days...there will be many days when serving the idol of yourself and making sinful choices that are in your best interest are more desirable to you than serving Jesus. And for all our wrong choices, our sins, God really should bring disaster on us, like he threatened to, and did, for the Israelites. And it should be eternal disaster.

And you're wishing you could just go back to simpler days, when your decisions, your choices, were simple: cereal or frozen waffles for breakfast, which Barbie am I going to play with, do I want to paint or do my coloring book.

Here's the simple choice....God's choice. And you can sum up God's choice, God decision for you in one simple word, grace.

You know what Joshua did before presenting the Israelites with their two options? He showed them God's grace. After all, who gave their forefather, Abraham, 100 years old at the time, and his barren wife Sarah...who gave them a son, maintaining the family line of the promised Savior? God in his grace. Who sent Moses and Aaron to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and then rescued them from Pharaoh's pursuing army by giving them safe passage through the Red Sea, and all that in the midst of the people's complaining? God in his grace. Who brought the Israelites to the Promised Land and then fought their battles for them and annihilated their enemies so they could inhabit the land when they rebelled against God more times than I'd care to count? God in his grace.

What has God in his grace done for you? Look at everything – in love he chose you to be his own, he redeemed you, paid for your sins, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, he called you to saving faith by the gospel, made you his own dear child on October 24, 2002 through the waters of baptism. He forgives you for all the poor decisions and wrong choices you make...even when you're not going to keep your confirmation vows, he forgives you. He lavishes on you the riches of his blessings. Why? Because of grace. You don't deserve it. We don't deserve it. God still gives it.

So Kristen, and fellow believers, in view of God's grace in action in your life, what's your decision? Along with Joshua...in this house, we serve the Lord. The Lord's underserved love, his powerful acts of rescue, his fulfilled promises, his covenant faithfulness – all these evidences of God's grace – they lead us to no other choice. God gives us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to our gracious and loving Lord. We choose God in the way we live our lives.

But, then, doesn't that lead us back to where we were...that on our own, we're going to make the wrong decisions. We're going to make sinful decisions. We're going to stray from God?

"Yes, and I ask God to help me." Don't neglect or diminish the importance and the meaning of those words you'll speak. "I ask God to help me" is the recognition we can't do any of that, we can't do anything God-pleasing on our own. We need God's help.

And he provides it...here (in his Word) and here (with your church family). Here, in God's Word, you see again and again God's grace and love for you. Here, the Holy Spirit feeds and strengthens your faith in Jesus every time you read and study. Use it. And your church family here, again, may not know you that well, but we love you, we care about you, we are here to support and encourage you. Don't neglect that but be an active part of this family and our work. And the same goes for everyone here as well.

Kristen, could you count the number of times you've recited the Pledge of Allegiance? I didn't think so. But, I'm sure you've said it so many times it's become rote. Do you know what it means? I won't ask you right now. This pledge, though, these confirmation vows and promises you're about to make, they're simple to say. But don't stop there. Mean it. Live it.

Kristen, it might be lonely...being the only one standing up here, making those decisions...being the one who might stick out at school, with your friends, because you're wanting to live for Jesus.

You're not alone. Take a look around you. Because in this house, we serve the Lord. Be comforted and encouraged in that...in us.

And take a look in here (God's Word). Joshua, even if he would have had to stand alone, he would serve the Lord. Even if no one would follow his lead, that would not change Joshua's stance. Jesus is always with you. Look at everything he's done for you...everything he's still doing for you. Let his love and his Word strengthen you in your faith and in your desire to live for him...to serve him.

And God, in his grace, will help you...with his love, his forgiveness, his guidance. And we will gladly serve the Lord. Amen.

