



**Liturgical Day:** The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
**Date:** October 4, 2009  
**Sermon Title:** As for Me and My House

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

Those of us who have been reading through the Bible have been at it for 21 days now. Despite my many concerns, I've been able to read 20 days worth of the Bible – which means that yesterday's schedule got a little out of control, and I didn't accomplish my homework. But I'll find some time tonight, and will be caught up by our meeting tomorrow evening. I want to offer a word of encouragement to any of the rest of you who have fallen off the pace. Don't give up! Get caught up! Stay with us! I know we're going to be blessed by making it all the way through. And for those of you who aren't part of the effort this time around: please keep us in your prayers. We could use the support!

This past Thursday, most of us were wading through the book of Joshua. It tells the story of what happens as Israel begins to conquer the Promised Land, during the 14<sup>th</sup> Century before Jesus is born. Joshua is the leader who takes over after the death of Moses, and who is appointed by God to lead the people into the Promised Land. It is, in many ways, a bloody and troublesome book. As Israel receives the land promised to their father Abraham, maybe 700 years earlier, there is (to use a modern euphemism) quite a bit of collateral damage. The people who had come to think of that land as their own had to be displaced, before Israel could make it their own home. And to our twenty-first century sensibilities, it is a difficult history to read.

But as we set aside some of the more troubling aspects of this narrative, at the center of the story is the power of God, and the people's willingness to trust in that power. Time and time again, Israel's smaller army comes up against larger and more powerful armies, and they are victorious. Not because of their own strength or ability or military strategy – but because of the power of God that moves through them and gives them the victory. Whenever Israel ignores God, and strikes out on its own, they are destroyed. But whenever they trust in God, despite the overwhelming odds against them, they are victorious.

Joshua proves to be a successful leader of Israel, not because of his extraordinary military knowledge, or his physical strength, or his ability to inspire the troops. Joshua proves to be successful because of his almost unflinching trust in God, and his willingness to take a shot at whatever God calls him to do.

Our assigned reading this past Thursday included the text we have for our focus this morning. Joshua is making a final address to the people of Israel, just as Moses did (if you remember, we read from the final words of Moses last Sunday). Joshua encourages the people of Israel to serve God in sincerity and in faithfulness. But then he does something profound. He immediately acknowledges that some of them may well choose not to put the God of their ancestors at the center of their lives. He knows that not everyone is going to agree with him. He knows that the people around him have a number of different options when they consider what it means to be a faithful people. He knows that they could worship Yahweh, of course: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But there were numerous other options available to them. Every neighborhood they went into had its own assortment of beliefs and customs. Some of their ancestors availed themselves of those local gods. The Amorites, who had possession of the land

they were trying to conquer, had their own gods. If you don't desire our God, then choose for yourselves which one you want to worship. "But," Joshua goes

FIRST LESSON

**GENESIS 2:18-24**

PSALM

**PSALM 8**

SECOND LESSON

**HEBREWS 1:1-4; 2:5-12**

GOSPEL LESSON

**ST. MARK 10:2-16**

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:

**JOB 1:1; 2:1-10**

**PSALM 26**

"90 DAYS" READING

**JOSHUA 24:1-3, 14-18**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**SOVEREIGN GOD, YOU  
HAVE CREATED US TO LIVE IN  
LOVING COMMUNITY WITH  
ONE ANOTHER. FORM US  
FOR LIFE THAT IS FAITHFUL  
AND STEADFAST, AND TEACH  
US TO TRUST LIKE LITTLE  
CHILDREN, THAT WE MAY  
REFLECT THE IMAGE OF YOUR  
SON, JESUS CHRIST, OUR  
SAVIOR AND LORD. AMEN.**

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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

on to say, “as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Here Joshua offers an insight into the character of his faith. It actually is an example of what lies at the core of an evangelical witness. Joshua is serving as an evangelist for God. And I love the way he goes about it. You and I could learn a great deal from his example. Joshua doesn't accuse those who believe differently than he does of heresy. He doesn't try to convince them that they are wrong. He doesn't challenge them to change the beliefs they have chosen. He simply announces to them that although they are free to do whatever they want – to believe whatever they believe – he and his household will serve God. And what's more, here is why: because it is God who brought them out of slavery. It is God who protected them along the journey. It is God who opened up this land for them to occupy.

Do you see what Joshua is doing here? He doesn't disparage what others might believe. He doesn't get into a theological battle with them. He doesn't claim that his religion is better than theirs, or that his beliefs make more sense than theirs, or that his God is stronger than theirs. He simply says, “I'm serving God, and this is why.” Those are pretty much his last words, and what a legacy they are – even to us today.

Joshua, years before Jesus was born, with no way of imagining the message that you and I have to share with the world, teaches us what it means to be an evangelist for Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be an evangelist? According to Joshua, it means:

1. First of all to know what God has done for us.

Joshua lived through a time when God was acting in extraordinary way on behalf of the people of Israel. Many in his day were not touched by God's action on their behalf. As you read the first six books of the Bible, it is apparent that the people spend a lot more time complaining than they do thanking God. But not Joshua. He seems genuinely touched by what God has done, and the experience has strengthened his faith.

2. Second, to be an evangelist means to be committed to serving God.

Joshua's job was to lead the people of Israel. He was to be their guide, as they moved into the Promised Land. There were plenty of times, of course, when he gave orders to them. But his leadership was not limited to coercion. He also led by example. He chose to put God at the center of his life. He chose to love the Lord God with all of his heart and soul and might. Regardless of what anyone else decided, Joshua was determined to serve God, and the witness of that determination inspired many Israelites to do the same.

3. And finally, to be an evangelist means to share with others what it is that God has done, and why that has been meaningful.

Here is where so many in our day get evangelism all wrong. Evangelism isn't standing out on a street corner, yelling at passers-by, and believing that you'll be able to force them to abandon their beliefs and adopt yours. Evangelism is simply putting into words what our faith means to us. The beauty of it is this: you can't argue with that. You can argue about the nature of God. You can argue about the inspiration of Scripture. You can argue about political or social convictions. You can argue about any number of things. But you can't argue about someone else's experience. “I'm a believer, and this is what it means to me,” is not a statement anyone else can contest; because the truth of it lies in the heart of the believer. That is evangelism at its best.

Saint Peter is a member congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are committed to making an evangelical witness of our faith to the world around us. This denomination – this church – is not just for those who already belong. It is also for those who have not yet joined us. And even more importantly, it is for those who do not yet know the grace that has touched our hearts. I hope this brief glimpse of Joshua, who lived more than thirteen centuries before Jesus, might help us as we reflect on what it means to be an evangelical people. We have a great God! God has blessed our lives in so many ways. Let's learn from Joshua. Let's be aware of the difference God has made in our lives. Let's commit ourselves to following God in all that we do. And let's discover those ways that we can faithfully and sincerely share that with others who might be

interested. In the final analysis, that is what it means to be an evangelical Christian. And that is what it means to learn from the man we meet in today's first lesson.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (October 4, 2009)

### Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>10:2</sup> Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"  
<sup>3</sup> He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'<sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,<sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." <sup>10</sup> Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup> He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup> and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." <sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. <sup>ii</sup>

### Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

<sup>10:2</sup> Καὶ προσελθόντες Φαρισαῖοι ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν εἰ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ γυναῖκα ἀπολύσαι, πειράζοντες αὐτόν. <sup>3</sup> ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τί ὑμῖν ἐνετείλατο Μωϋσῆς; <sup>4</sup> οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· ἐπέτρεπεν Μωϋσῆς βιβλίον ἀποστασίου γράψαι καὶ ἀπολύσαι. <sup>5</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν γράψεν ὑμῖν τὴν ἐντολὴν ταύτην. <sup>6</sup> ἀπὸ δὲ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως ἦν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς· <sup>7</sup> ἐνεκεν τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα [καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ], <sup>8</sup> καὶ σονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν· ὥστε οὐκέτι εἰσὶν δύο ἀλλὰ μία σὰρξ. <sup>9</sup> ὁ οὖν ὁ θεὸς συνέζευξεν ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω. <sup>10</sup> Καὶ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν πάλιν οἱ μαθηταὶ περὶ τούτου ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν. <sup>11</sup> καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ὅς ν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ γαμήσῃ ἄλλην μοιχᾶται ἐπ' αὐτήν· <sup>12</sup> καὶ ἐὰν αὐτὴ ἀπολύσασα τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς γαμήσῃ ἄλλον μοιχᾶται. <sup>13</sup> Καὶ προσέφερον αὐτῷ παιδία νὰ αὐτῶν ψηταῖ· οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐπετίμησαν αὐτοῖς. <sup>14</sup> ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἠγαπάκησεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἄφετε τὰ παιδία ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με, μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>15</sup> ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅς ν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν. <sup>16</sup> καὶ ἐναγκαλισάμενος αὐτὰ κατευλόγει τοὺς χεῖρας ἐπ' αὐτά. <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> St. Mark 10:2-16, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Mark 10:2-16, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

**“The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:**

<sup>24:1</sup> Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. <sup>3</sup> Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.

<sup>14</sup> “Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region 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.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; <sup>18</sup> and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”<sup>iv</sup>

**Scheduled Readings for  
“The Bible in 90 Days”  
9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Begin Reading At</u>	<u>Sermon Based On</u>
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11

<sup>iv</sup> Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).