

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
August 24-25, 2024
“Choose this Day”
Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

¹Then 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. ^{2a}And Joshua said to all the people, ¹⁴“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. ¹⁵Now 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.”

¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷for 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; ¹⁸and 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.”

Ephesians 6:10-20 Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

God is in the house!

We all belong to specific tribes. In fact we all belong to numerous specific and general, tribes. Please know that when I use the word tribe it is not connected to or in any way disparaging of our Native American brothers and sisters. ‘A tribe is any

group of people united by common beliefs or traditions. They often follow a identified leader. They consider themselves a community based on shared realities.’¹

On rehearsal night at weddings, I always say to the two families gathered, “When this bride and groom say their vows, they are not only marrying each other they are marrying into each others tribes.

Yes! Our families are a tribe. Our graduating high school class is a smaller tribe, within the larger tribe of the high school itself. Scouts, soccer teams, Bible study...we all have tribes.

On specific days of the week, I know that Ted is driving for Saints and that's a tribe. On Wednesdays, Deb is practicing in New Horizons band one of her various tribes. If it's football season and the Packers are on, I know Pat is glued to his TV! Ron has a group of retired school teachers, Lynn and others volunteer at the food bank. We all have groups of people with shared realities, shared vision, and shared convictions.

Let me ask you. As you think about the tribes that you associate with, call out what benefits you receive from your tribe? (Belonging, identity, meaning, friendship, love)

Exactly! Many studies have been done on what makes octogenarians, nonagenarians, and centenarians, live so long? What are the common threads between people in their 80's-100's? Almost every study includes, being connected to something larger than oneself. That can be a tribe.

Old Testament... the book of Joshua describes the entry of God's people, Israel, into the promised land of Canaan after their time of wandering in the wilderness. The Israelites had turned away from God's law and following God. Therefore, at the end of the book of Joshua, he presses them to recommit to the one true God.

¹⁴“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. ¹⁵Now 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.”

It is a strong reminder to God's people that things did not go well for them when they did turn away from the covenantal relationship that God had made with them through their ancestor Abraham, long ago.

Acknowledging all the positive benefits of the tribes that we connect with, have you and I made any of those tribes into small letter g, god's? I will absolutely tell you that going to the Taylor Swift concert was an absolute highlight of my life It was fun, crazy, loud, amazing! And... As I looked around at all of those elementary school aged girls idealizing this female singer, I couldn't help but wonder if this was verging on a religious experience for them.

The same could be said for football, basketball and hockey teams, NASCAR drivers, Hollywood actors, idolizing a royal family member, or a historical figure, ...(I'm trying to be an equal opportunity offender here can you tell...) From singing Jesus loves me to saying the Pledge of Allegiance as an elementary school aged child, we are all taught to identify with and have allegiance to tribes. But when and how does our allegiance turn into worship of one person or one idea neither of which derive from our faith?

Although the two did meld once. While teaching a Baptismal class of parents, we talked about how Baptism was like joining a family or being on God's team. One very enthusiastic first time father, who was a big-time Nebraska fan said, "Can we get him baptized all dressed in Husker's Red?" (Right Neva? Go Big Red)

Choose this day, whom you will serve...either the gods of the Amorites, pop culture, fast cars, the Huskers or the Lord? How are we doing choosing the Lord and serving only God? We all benefit, clearly, from connection to something larger than ourselves that we find purpose, identity and derive meaning from. Which group do we make the most important?

Now on to the Ephesians text. This isn't the sermon to talk about spiritual warfare or if there truly is a Satan sitting on one shoulder urging us to turn away from God. And, I do believe that you and I exist within a spiritual realm. That is to say again, "We are spiritual beings on a human journey, not human beings on a spiritual journey." We tend to discount mind, body and spirit being completely connected, preferring instead to believe its only mind and body.

Therefore Paul writes, Put on the whole armor of God. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with

which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times.

These are the ways in which we can hold fast and serve the one true God. God has given us everything that we need to love and serve God. God's truth, the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in whom we find our salvation, the word of God, the Holy Spirit to guide and direct.

As I said earlier being connected to something and someone larger than ourselves has lots of positive benefits. And it can be a slippery slope. A pastor's wife who was very much into exercise and being healthy attended a hot yoga class for the first time. In describing it to me she said, "that was church for them! That hour was church for those people."

Rooted in the Indian Vedic tradition (a predecessor of Hinduism), [yoga postures](https://www.livestrong.com/article/395082-spiritual-meanings-of-yoga-postures/) are deeply symbolic...the spiritual purpose of yoga — to help you align with your "true" or "higher" self, soul or spirit (whatever you want to call it).
<https://www.livestrong.com/article/395082-spiritual-meanings-of-yoga-postures/>

You are I aren't Hindus. Does that mean we shouldn't practice yoga? No. Pam leads our women in relaxing yoga each week. She is and we are careful not to conflate and mix the spiritual meanings of the poses with our Christian beliefs. God asks us to watch who we are becoming. God asks us to be diligent in discerning what enters our minds.

Because if we don't choose what grabs and holds our attention, our hearts and minds and spirits, something will choose us! As a wise person once said, "You don't have to let everything or everyone build a nest in your head."

Here's the Gospel, the Good News for today. Do we remember the story about the Shepherd going after the one lost sheep? The woman searching her house for her one lost coin? The loving Father running to meet the prodigal son after he wasted his money and lost his very self in a far away land? God is always choosing us.

The shepherd left the 99. He walked up and down hills, he called that little lamb's name. He got hot in the mid-day sun. The woman looking for her one lost coin? She put on her apron and tied her kerchief. She put the nine into a jar. Then she swept carefully. She got down on her hands and knees. Pulled back the rug. Runs to tell the neighbors, "Rejoice with me, I have found the coin that was lost." Jesus

editorial note is the same for all three stories. ‘There is joy in the presence of heaven over one sinner who repents.’

God who created us, understands our very natures. Even if we run after all the bright, shiny, squirrels in our lives, God is not only waiting patiently, God is seeking us out when we go after those small letter g, gods. Thank the Lord, God understands our short attention spans. God knows how challenging it can be to stay the course. God provides the Holy Spirit to nudge us back on course. With all respect to Joshua, this choosing who we will serve is not simply ours alone to choose. God has already chosen and keeps choosing us to serve God and love God. Thanks be to God! Amen.

ⁱ The Seven Faith Tribes. George Barna. Barna; Tydale House Publishers, Inc. TN. 2009. Pg 16)