

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 21- 22, 2021

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Ephesians 5: 21-32; John 6: 60-69

Preacher: Deni Mack

Remember when your children were little? Many of us could have said with Joshua, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Now, some of our grown children no longer attend church but we know our children. Their lives show they’ve not cast off the values we taught them. They’ve not closed their hearts to God’s call to live a purposeful life. Many are very good people who make a positive difference in their sphere of influence.

Jesus and the church do not force adherence, but invite, urge and appeal. We look at our own lives and ask God’s help as we say, “As for me, I will serve the Lord.” In the Hebraic language in which Joshua spoke those words, the words we’ve translated to *serve* means to *worship* as well. Many of us readily join Joshua in assuring God and one another we will both serve and worship God.

Our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites heard Joshua say, “decide today whom you will serve, the gods of your fathers ... or the gods of the Amorites? Who do we serve? Sure, parents serve the needs of their children; spouses serve the needs of each other; religion teachers serve the needs of their students. All that is noble and good, but our lives paint a more complex picture. What do our lives say about who we serve? Our kids gave us a Netflix subscription for Christmas. One of the series we tried was full of graphic violence. We turned it off. We watched two other complete series: laughed our fool heads off at one and moaned through the other, but it was worth our groaning through episodes of the protagonists’ brilliance compromised by self destructive choices. It was well worth our time and attention as the closing session showed genuine compassion where friends selflessly stood by one another through very rough times. They brought the best out of one another.

Our choices on how we spend our time indicate the values we serve.

How we spend our time, treasure and talent indicate our priorities, the gods we serve. Our Sacred Scriptures today invite us to choose God and goodness, not going along to get along, not greed, violence, and corruption.

Our spiritual ancestors were reminded by Joshua of God’s faithful love, mercy and care. We too revel in God’s compassionate mercy. So much so that on our good days we radiate God’s love. God inspires us to love, yet God’s glorious creation is not feeling the love. People, surely not us, are polluting God’s creation. People, surely not us, buy Styrofoam and single use plastics. Those who serve the Lord protect the environment. We care about the quality of the

air that all children breathe. Children who live near incinerators need people to serve the Lord by striving to change policies that permit incinerators to be built where people live.

Those who serve the Lord care about essential workers who cannot afford safe housing. Those who serve the Lord care about children's access to fresh food and adequate health care. Only some essential workers earn enough to pay for necessities. None of us can do everything but each of us can do something that makes life bearable for people in need. We serve the Lord by addressing the needs of the common good.

In today's Gospel Jesus concludes his Bread of Life teaching and like Joshua, Jesus asks the people to choose for or against him. Jesus asks us that every day. Like Peter we say, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." If we were to check our calendar and list the names of people we spend time with and on what we spend our money and see who we text and to whom we send emails, we'd see who we serve. Like Joshua and friends of God throughout history, our actions say, "We serve the Lord."

Added note: The Ephesians reading today needs mention because many are shaken by the order to wives to be subject to their husbands in everything. When Paul and his followers wrote Ephesians and Colossians they tried to regulate Christian behavior to match the culture around them. The church continues that old error by proclaiming that sentence even though such teaching has proven to be deeply harmful and one of the reasons so many people have left the church. Thank God the church no longer proclaims a similar biblical passage, "Slaves be submissive to your master."