

We have been reading through the Old Testament story of Joshua over the past several weeks. We have learned that Moses was called by God to lead God's people out of slavery toward the Promised Land of Canaan. Moses led the people up to the Promised Land of Canaan but it was Joshua's responsibility to lead the people into the Promised Land.

We have heard stories over the past 2 weeks of Joshua sending spies into the town of Jericho to check out the situation. The spies that Joshua sent out reported back that the people living in Canaan were fearful of God's people and fearful of God's ability.

So Joshua listened to the reports of these spies and prepared the people to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. The first obstacle that they had to cross was the Jordan River. But just like God did with the Red Sea or Reed Sea when the Israelites were fleeing the Egyptians, God parted the waters of the Jordan River and allowed for the people of God to enter the land that had been promised to their ancestors.

The land of Canaan was made up of city-states. There was not a national, unified government. The first city that the Israelites come to in Canaan is the town of Jericho. We may have heard the story as a child of what happened when God's people came to the town of Jericho.

I could tell you about the 6 days that God's people marched around Jericho and then how on the 7th day they marched around 7 times, blew their horns, and the walls of the city came tumbling down. I could tell you about it or I could let this quartet explain it to you. I think you will prefer their version rather than my version.

Show video clip of group performing "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho."

The Israelites do defeat the residents of Jericho. And then they travel through lots of other city-states and achieve victories throughout the region.

After all of these victories, Joshua gathers all of the people in the town of Shechem. Shechem is a town where covenants have a history of being made. Let us listen to the covenant that Joshua and the people and God make with one another.

Read Joshua 24: 1-28

“As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”

All of the obstacles have been defeated and it is now time for God’s people to settle into the Promised Land of Canaan. So Joshua gathers the people all together. It is time for them to make a public declaration of faith in the presence of one another and in the presence of the God who brought them to this place.

Joshua asks the people who they serve. All of the people declare “as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Joshua asks them again. And again they declare, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” Joshua asks them again and again they declare, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”

This week we all have the opportunity to share Thanksgiving. Some of us will be traveling to other communities to share a meal with family. Some of us will have family who will come to our house. Some of us will get together with friends.

One of the ways that I invite each of us to live out our faith this Thanksgiving is to pay attention to anyone who may not have a place to celebrate Thanksgiving this year. This person may be away from family or close friends this Thanksgiving for various reasons.

Invite that person to your home for Thanksgiving if possible or find another way to help that person have some community this season of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving can also be a very lonely time. Therefore, Thanksgiving can be a wonderful opportunity to share Christian hospitality.

Before we share a Thanksgiving meal this year though, we are invited to share a much smaller meal in size but a much bigger meal in meaning. Today we are all invited to share the Sacrament of Holy Communion. I love that we are sharing communion today before Thanksgiving. Holy Communion reminds us where real communion is found and that is in the company of the Risen Lord.

But as you gather around and share a Thanksgiving meal this coming Thursday, wherever that may be, I invite you to remember what happened with Joshua at Shechem. As you gather this Thanksgiving, I invite you to ask yourself or to ask your family this question. Who do you serve? Who do you serve? When it comes to you and your family, who do you really serve?

When God's people were asked that question, they answered over and over, "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Who do you serve in your house? Who do you serve in your life? Who do you really serve?

That might be a good question to ask yourself this Thanksgiving. AMEN.

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-Given: November 23, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)