

Joshua 24:1-18

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. ²And 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. ³Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; ⁴and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. ⁶When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time... Then,

¹³I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive-yards that you did not plant. 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."

JOHN 6:56-69

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Remembering Our Story August 26, 2018

There is a beautiful old song that comes from the musical, *The Fantastiks*, called *Try to Remember*. It became a popular hit in the 1960's which some of you may recall. It came to my mind as I was reading about Josh and

the people this week as they were being called to remember their journey with God. The first verse went like this:

*Try to remember the kind of September
When life was slow and oh so mellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
When grass was green and grain was yellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
When you were a tender and callow fellow.
Try to remember and if you remember
then follow, follow, follow, follow.*

It reminds me of a movie that was popular a few years ago called, *The Notebook*. It starred James Garner, Gene Rowlands, Rachel McAdams, and Ryan Gosling. The story centers around two young people, Allie and Noah, who fall in love and make plans for the future only to have those plans be met with resistance and conflict that ultimately sends them on separate paths in their lives. However, their love for one another never fades, and they are reunited after several years and spend the rest of their lives together. The movie begins with an elderly man, played by James Garner, reading from a notebook to an elderly woman (Gene Rowlands) who is in a nursing home and clearly suffering from dementia. The story he is reading recounts the story of the two young lovers whose names are Allie and Noah. As the movie comes to a close you discover that Garner and Rowlands are the elder Allie and Noah and that he is telling her their story so that she will remember who he is, and who they are. For a brief moment, Allie becomes lucid. She remembers that the story he is reading is the story of how they met and Allie suddenly remembers her past. And she remembers that at the onset of her dementia, she wrote their love story in the notebook with instructions for Noah to, "read this to me, and I'll come back to you."

I think that is what the people are being asked to do as well in our story this morning. Joshua reminds the people of their own story. A story that takes them back to a time when the world was against them and they were on the run. A time when food and water were in short supply and enemies were breathing down their necks. But also a time when God, who is ever faithful, guided and provided for them as they wandered through the wilderness. A time when God moved ahead of them and prepared the way even when they were unaware of it.

It's a story that we hear over and over again not only in the Old Testament but also in the New. In Acts chapter seven, Stephen recounts the entire story of the Hebrew people being rescued from Egypt and their lives in the wilderness. It is the story of the people and the nation of Israel. It binds them together and is passed down from generation to generation. As Allie said in the *Notebook*, "Read this to me and I will come back to you." It is their story and I think it is also our own story. And I wonder if your stories, like mine, remind you that God has been with you? Has God brought you out of any particular wilderness in your life or is God still leading you through it? Or maybe both?

And sometimes, just like those wandering Hebrews, we have to stop and remember that God has been with us; not only with us, but for us, before we remember how grateful we are, and how faithful we want to be, because of God's faithful covenant promises to us. That He feeds us and protects, both spiritually and physically, and leads us in the many wildernesses of our lives. I think that often it is only in looking backward that we remember who we are and where our true strength and courage for living comes from. And when we are so busy in the world and so distraught over the fear of the future and the present, we forget that God has been present in our lives all along.

Like you, I've faced some difficult moments in my life. Fearful moments, angry moments, times when life didn't work out the way I thought it would. Times when I made some really stupid choices, wandering in the wilderness of my own making. *Prone to wander, Lord I feel it! Prone to leave the God I love!* But I have come to believe that no matter the circumstances or challenges, that everything will work out. I often get asked by those close to me, "How do you know that?" and my response, and you may think me naïve, is, "Because it always does!" If we abide in God's love and covenant promise, no matter how it turns out, it will be ok. Now that doesn't mean we like it or that it is always joyous, but it will be ok because we belong to God and in God, there is nothing to fear. As I look back over the course of my life I can see that, and maybe you can too. Some of you don't have enough years on you yet but trust me someday you will remember that God was with you all along life's way.

I've spent time with so many people in my life who are older and wiser than I. And with few exceptions they affirm for me that God has been present in their lives. Something they are deeply thankful for and seemingly aware of as they go through their days. This may be unique to those who are older and wiser, but maybe not.

And I don't know if this is about us choosing God or God choosing us. Our stories seem to say both. That may be a mystery we'll just have to live with until we see Jesus face to face. And maybe those who don't experience God in this way are still working toward the place where they will remember. Jesus says, "He is about spirit and life", that we come to this relationship because God draws us to it. That were it not for the Holy Spirit urging and nudging us, we wouldn't even be thinking about God or the Holy. Perhaps it should remind us that salvation and restoration is something God does for us and not something we do on our own. More about God, and less about you and me.

This is a day of remembering who you belong to and who has guided you. To remember not only God but those whom God used in your life to shape and mold and grow you into who you are today.

There was a wonderful video clip of the late Mr. Fred Rogers who gave this moving speech as he accepted a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997. He began of course by saying, "Oh, it's a beautiful night in this neighborhood." He went on to say, "So many people have helped me to come to this night. Some of you are here, some are far away, some are even in heaven. All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take, along with me, ten seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are, those who have cared about you, and wanted what was best for you in life. Ten seconds of silence. I'll watch the time"...after ten seconds he said, "Whomever you've been thinking about, how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they've made. You know they're the kind of people television does well to offer our world."

And so, I think it would be good this morning if we did what Mr. Rogers asked his friends to do, and that is to take a moment and remember, just as Joshua asked the Israelites to do. I want to you to close your eyes and take twenty seconds and think about how God has been at work in your lives. Not just today or yesterday but for all the years you have walked this earth. And to remember those whom God placed in your path that encouraged you to become the very best version of yourself. And reaffirm for yourself, who you will choose to follow this day. Whom will you serve? Even if it takes you to places you never dreamed of. Let's close our eyes and do that for 20 seconds. I'll watch the time...

A few years ago, a very special person gave me this story after worship. It is one that I've shared before but one that I always love to share again because it speaks powerfully to how we experience God in our daily lives. It's an anonymous story titled "I Am Riding A Bike" and it goes like this.

“At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like the President. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I didn’t really know him.

But later on, when I recognized God, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed God was in the back helping me pedal. I don’t know when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring but predictable. It was the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He took delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds; it was all I could do to hang on. Even though it looked like madness, He said, “Pedal”

I was worried and was anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?” He just smiled, and didn’t answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I said, “I’m scared.” God leaned back, and would touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts I needed; gifts of healing and acceptance and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, God’s and mine.

And then we would be off again. Then He’d say, “Give those gifts away—they’re extra baggage, too much weight.” So I did, to the people we’d meet. It was then I found that in giving we receive. Our burden was light.

I didn’t trust Him at first, you know—being in total control of my life. I thought, “What if He wrecks it?” But God knows, “bike secrets.” He knows how to make it bend to take the sharp corners; how to jump to clear high rocks; and how to fly to shorten scary passages.

I am starting to learn to shut up and pedal in some of the strangest places. I am beginning to enjoy the cool breeze on my face, with my delightful Companion pedaling with me.

And when I am sure I just can’t do any more, He just smiles and says, “Pedal!”

Thanks be to God! Amen.