

November 8: 8:30 am

Sermon Series/Message: Why Give: Witness Part 1

Scripture-Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are in a new sermon series entitled “Why Give?”; a series designed to help us as a community discover the motivation for why we give in the areas of our membership vows; prayers, presence, service, gifts and witness; especially when times are as they are now; tense, stressful, uncertain, divisive and the list goes on.

- And why I am excited to explore our passage of Joshua today is because this passage indirectly addresses the topic I am inviting us to discern individually; why give as it pertains to the membership vow of witness.

- And so before exploring how Joshua addresses this; let me first share a little information on where our membership vows stemmed from;
- So a little history behind why these five areas became the tenets to our Methodist Church core values; when new members join The United Methodist Church, they profess the vows of the [Baptismal Covenant](#).
- They promise to be loyal to Christ through the global United Methodist Church and to be active participants in a local congregation, pledging "to faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service and their witness."
- Furthermore, the word "witness" was added by the 2008 United Methodist General Conference to highlight the mission and evangelistic responsibilities of church membership.

- It also reminds United Methodists to live out our vows publicly, according to the Rev. Mark W. Stamm, professor of Christian worship at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.
- "All of those (others) can be done fairly privately," he said (meaning prayer, presence, gifts and service).
- However as I paraphrase his statements as it pertains to what it means to be a witness he said, "If we're making disciples for the transformation of the world, then we need to remind ourselves that this isn't just an act of piety that we do privately ...
- Being a witness does not just apply to the people with whom we worship God — our local church —
- On the contrary, being a witness involves living out the gospel publicly in ways that can be seen.... that's what witness is all about."

- So to put it even plainer; to be a witness means to not just say that we are followers of Christ; but to strive to live out our lives in such a way where our light of Christ is evident;
- To live out our lives in a way where our love is evident;
- Being a witness means engaging the world and others in a way where our inner Imago Dei; the God within us, penetrates through in such a mighty way; where the outside world can just tell that we are indeed sincere;
- Where the outside world can see that we are indeed trustworthy;
- Where the outside world can tangibly see that we are not just self righteous people who pride ourselves upon values that are merely just lip service;

- But instead we are followers of Christ striving to live out our lives as righteous seekers embodying what it means to love God and love our neighbors.
- And so why I am so excited about our Joshua passage today, is that before he proceeds to fully lead the people to the land that was promised to them; he asked an important question for them to consider.
- He asked the people in verse 15 as I paraphrase the text; **to choose this day who they were going to serve?**
- **And** church, why I believe our lectionary has this passage going from v1-3 and then jumps down to v 14-25 because as I personalize this passage, Joshua was basically saying to the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; *Long ago your ancestors—*

Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.

- **3** *Then 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;*
- Then if you will continue with me down memory lane Joshua was reminding these people as I paraphrase the missing verses of (4-13), **how God** took them out of slavery from Egypt to give them a new way;
- **And how God** parted the Red Sea so that they could escape their oppressors;
- **And how God** essentially gave them a land with new opportunities;
- So basically this introduction our text church was Joshua reminding the people how sovereign God is;

- He was reminding them how faithful God is and how God brought them through so that they could have better days ahead.
- And so now the decision was theirs to make....
- Joshua was saying to them church, that God did what God was going to do...now ***who are you going to serve?***
- And the people's response can be found in verse 16 and their response was "*Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 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; 18 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.”

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- **Family for me this entire interaction is the epitome of what you and I must ask ourselves as we consider what it means to be a witness of God’s love and light....**
- Because for me as I engage this passage of scripture, when the Israelites responded in the way that they did, their response in context with our sermon topic this morning of witness was basically saying that they desired to live a life that portrayed a witness of the sovereign God who brought them through their wilderness experience.
- This is what makes this passage of Joshua such a historic moment church.

- Because we all had witnessed prior to, a people who we were not entirely sure if they would follow God;
- For they worshipped golden calves and other idols;
- They often grumbled against their appointed leaders...
- So it was really touch and go for a moment.
- In all honesty, looking at their supposed 3 week journey that would become 40 years in the wilderness; I was not sure if the Israelites would ever make this great of a progress in their faith...
- I was not sure if they would ever be unified enough to decide that they would follow God's ways.....but they did get there.
- Not suggesting that they would be the perfect witness of God's love and light going forward because no one is perfect Amen...

- But again, you and I are witnessing a historic moment for these people because now we are beginning to see their intentions surface;
- Now we are beginning to see their hearts soften;
- Now we are beginning to see their walls of distrust, trauma, disobedience and fear lower;
- Now alas we are beginning to see that Imago Dei that I have preaching over a year now that resides in all of us, emerge from these stiff necked people when they said, ***yes I choose to serve the Lord; yes I choose to live my life as witness of God's love and light!***
- **We as you all know as a people today have entered another very historic moment.**
- For the country; actually the entire world; has been on the edge of their seats for years, months, weeks and

days to learn what will the leadership look like for the next presidential term.

- And I need to say with a level of honesty, vulnerability and transparency that I was initially at a loss with how to approach this particular sermon because frankly, the country has been almost equally divided regarding who they thought should be in office.
- I am also fully aware that although we at First UMC profess to be a reconciling church and ministry who seeks to affirm and include all people regardless of race, sex, gender identification, sexual preference and more; not everyone is happy with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris being our next president elect/vice president elect of our country.
- So after thoughtful consideration, I have decided to approach all that we have experienced as a country and share with you lessons that I have learned from

this election process as it pertains to what it means to be a witness and what it means to be a leader.

- I also would invite you to continue this soul searching process within yourself; for I believe what we have experienced as a country/world, provides many lessons for all of us as it pertains to what it means to be a witness, if we are open to this discernment process.
- So some of the lessons I have learned from this election process as it pertains to what it means to be a witness is considering first off how I would like my leadership to be portrayed in not just the church community that I serve, but also in my social media presence, my family presence, my everyday life.
- Questions that began my discernment process included:
 - How do I want the world to experience my leadership?

- What does my witness look like when things are going well in my life?
- What does my witness look like when things are not?
- Do my actions reflect the values and principles of love?
- Do my actions and words build others up or tear them down?
- Does my witness reflect unification or division?
- Is my witness something that I would want my children to model, my future grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces and nephews?
- Does my witness contribute to the kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven?
- Does my witness reflect the Imago Dei, God within me?

- Does my witness contribute to some of the generational curses that exists within my genealogical history or does it promote a legacy of peace, health and wholeness?
- Does my witness provoke war or promote peace?
- Is my witness self centered or is it God centered?
- These are some of the questions that I am working through as I take all of what our country/world have experienced as it pertains to this election process.
- Furthermore I believe that there are many lessons that we can learn from both sides.
- But the biggest aha moment that I have learned from our scripture today and the turn of events of our country/world is that **our witness matters!**
- This is why I believe Joshua asked the Israelites this very pointed question, ***choose this day who you will serve***....because I will say it again....our witness

matters....it matters to the world we live in, it matters especially to God.

- So I will leave this question with us all to continue to explore as we work through the complex emotions of what it means to be a witness; **in a time** where a virus is rising and impacting our lives in a horrific way; **in a time** where the work of promoting unity in a world where just under 50 percent of the country is unsettlingly comfortable with the division (as the election results reveal) will be a tremendous challenge; what will your witness be? What will my witness be?
- For our witness matters.....
- For it is our witness that I wholeheartedly believe what will determine how long we stay in the wilderness.