

Pentecost 14B

September 6, 2009

Hymns: 556 - 506 - 403 - 356

JOSHUA 24:1-18

KNOW YOUR HISTORY!

***Don't Let Your Bible History Knowledge Fade Away!**

***Don't Let Your Christian Heritage Slip Away!**

***Do Resolve To Make History With Your God All The Way To Eternity!**

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through your knowledge of the Biblical historical record of God and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Dear worshipers,

(slide 1) **“Return with me to those thrilling days of yester years. The Lone Ranger rides again!”** With those words and the rearing Silver projected on the wall, the Saturday morning Lone Ranger show began back in the 1950s. I remember how excited I got when it was time for that weekly show. The Lone Ranger! - one of my favorite TV shows, if not my very favorite for a number of years. And it was sponsored by Cheerios, those toasty little “O”s that made for that big circle of muscle in a growing kid’s bicep. One thing I forgot over the years is that the Lone Ranger, like Roy Rogers, never shot one single person! He and Roy always shot the guns out of the hands of the bad guys and then there often ensued a fist fight that led to the bad guys with their hands tied or handcuffed behind their back.

What do you remember from many years ago? More importantly, what do you remember from those Bible story lessons you learned back in grade school? How much are you conscious of the Christian heritage that you have going back perhaps generations? Or, are you a new Christian who will want to cherish a new beginning of a heritage that you hope will go on and on in the generations after you?

It was just such thoughts that Joshua had in mind when he called together the people of Israel and exhorted them “Know Your History!” (slide 2) Their gathering place was at Shechem, the first place in Canaan mentioned after Abraham arrived in the land. Here the Lord first promised: *To your offspring I will give this land (Genesis 12:7)*. Abraham responded by building the first altar to the Lord in Canaan. Jacob later settled at Shechem when he returned from Haran. At Shechem Jacob’s sons were grazing their father’s flocks when Joseph was sent to check on them. That event gives the background to the years of bondage in Egypt for God’s people Israel. Are you familiar with how those Bible lessons went? To be sure, thoughts of God’s early promises and lasting faithfulness already filled this site as Joshua assembles the Israelites here.

And how does Joshua start out this assembly dialogue? He recalls choice portions of history that punctuate God’s undeserved love and powerful acts for His people. In the very chapter before this, Joshua had recalled God’s acts in the immediate past of the conquest years. Beginning with the fall of Jericho’s walls, God had given the people of Canaan into the hands of the Israelites for their victory. Now Joshua’s sweep is much broader. He goes back about 500 years to God’s selection of Abraham when he lived beyond the Euphrates River. It is clear that Abraham and his offspring the Israelites became the chosen nation only by God’s gracious choice and not because of some superior quality of their own. After all, Abraham came from a family of idol worshipers! Israel had no cause for personal pride, but every reason to glory in the Lord. He chose their forefathers by pure grace when they were no different from their neighbors who worshipped the moon god.

As the Lord’s mouthpiece, Joshua accents many episodes of God’s gracious guidance in the history of Israel: the sending of Moses and Aaron to prepare for Israel’s release from Egypt, the ten plagues on the Egyptians, the great day of exodus, the miracle when the Lord turned a corridor of the Red Sea into dry land, the Lord’s care for His often grumbling people during the forty long desert years, the Lord’s control over Balaam so that he blessed Israel when commanded by King Balak to curse - and so it goes on and on! What Israelite can keep loyalty to the Lord from welling up as these historical facts pass from Joshua’s lips?!

Friend, wouldn't you be loyal to God as you remember His mighty acts in behalf of Israel and all mankind – including you!? God's loving acts of creation, the preservation of Noah's family and the animals on the ark, the Old Testament record of God blessing Abraham and his descendants? The ultimate sending of your Savior through the Jews in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection for your redemption and justification? Jesus' promise to you in His Ascension that He is with you always until the end of the world, when He is coming back visibly for you?! Don't let your Bible History knowledge dissipate away! Review the wonderful works of God regularly in worship, Bible Classes, Meditation, and otherwise!

Don't allow your personal Christian heritage to slip away either! Christians who speak with pride of coming from a long line of believers should go back a bit farther. We also find our ancestors steeped in dark superstitions, **(slide 3) *Without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12)***. Two weeks from now the city of New Ulm will be abuzz with celebrating the 2000th anniversary of Hermann the German's victory over the Romans. Yes, I did say 2000th anniversary! Some of you might have been thinking that Hermann must have been a contemporary of Luther fighting off the pope's men from Rome. Isn't that the reason for the Hermann the German monument across the street from our Martin Luther College campus?! Not really. What if I told you it was during Jesus' childhood, that Hermann was rallying the splintered barbarian clans of Germany to hold off the invasion of Caesar's troops!? This was before Jesus grew up and went to the cross, died, rose, and reascended into heaven. It was years before the Pentecost beginning of the New Testament Church, and before the beginning of four centuries of Roman Empire persecution of Christians. It would be many centuries after Hermann's defeat of the Romans that the people of northern Europe would be converted to Christianity!

Maybe your Christianity is a heritage that has been passed down to you from the time of the Reformation. Maybe your ancestral roots are Christian in the Roman Catholic Church before the Reformation. **(slide 4)** Or maybe your ancestors were American slaves who took Christianity back to Liberia 200 years ago. Or maybe your ancestors in the interior of Liberia were converted to Christianity only a hundred or fewer years ago by missionaries from Europe. Maybe your family hasn't been church people for generations. Perhaps you are a first generation Christian among unbelieving relatives.

Whatever the case, don't let your Christian heritage slip away! You have been baptized into God's family. God has chosen you for salvation. You are a soldier of the cross. You did not choose Him. But you and I possess that terrible power to reject our faith and salvation. You already own the gift of faith from the Lord. Like the Israelites you can choose to abandon the Lord – or by the Spirit already given you – you can confirm your God-given faith and renew the covenant your Lord has put in place. Most of you did renew your Baptismal grace in a very special way when you made your Confirmation vows. But Joshua's words of challenge are applicable for YOU this day as well: ***Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the (Atlantic), and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your forefathers....or the gods...in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!***

And so, Israel faced a choice. When seen clearly, the choice is easy. It is between idols of wood, stone, and metal on the one hand...and the living, powerful, gracious Lord on the other. It is between gods who were powerless to help their worshipers keep their land and the Lord Who has just given His people that same land. The gods who brought the Canaanites defeat or the God Who brought the Israelites to where they were that day. Joshua says, "Choose!" While the choice was clear to the people of Israel at Shechem that day, the author of the Bible book after Joshua – Judges – tells of Israel's tragic change of choice not much later. And 650 years after Joshua, the prophet Hosea wrote: ***They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood (4:12). They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calf idols (13:2).***

(slide 5) You and I live going on 500 years after the Reformation marked as beginning in 1517AD. Human nature, the pressures of society, and the great Deceiver are hard at work to blur the obvious choice for you and me. Our culture –*in whose land you are living* - has swallowed evolution which leads to the ultimate conclusion that chance and accident control life. There is no god running the universe. Filling the void of

God is humanism. People today worship themselves. All truth and good and morals are relative. Again, there is no god to whom we are all accountable. "If it works for me, it must be good." Modern man seeks security and meaning for life in mere things. *The gods in whose land you are living* have become military arms, stocks and bonds, Ipods and HD TV, the diversion of sports and recreation, sex and drugs. What a sorry lot we have become! Instead of looking to the living, powerful, gracious Lord for meaning and purpose in life – we cling to our idols.

Joshua expresses a bold and unashamed statement of personal commitment to the Lord. Even if he stands alone, as he and Caleb did when they were spies on the land of Canaan.....Do you remember that Bible history? Even if alone, HE will serve the Lord! At the same time, he will use his role as the head of his house to lead those under his care to serve the Lord. What led Joshua to his bold creed commitment? It was the Lord's undeserved love, powerful acts of rescue, fulfilled promises and covenant faithfulness, even as Joshua had just reviewed for the people of Israel.

How about you and your household? Will you fear and serve the Lord?! To fear the Lord means to stand in awe of Him, to honor Him, to give Him allegiance. To serve the Lord includes worship, trust, love, and grateful obedience. By His Spirit the Lord leads you and me to the same firm statement of faith as Joshua. When the marvelous record of God's love in Christ takes hold of our hearts, we will do the same. Remember how God chose you from eternity to be His own? Remember how He redeemed you through the blood of Christ? Remember how He called you to saving faith by the Gospel in Word and Baptism? Remember! Besides all the material blessings of this land in which you live, remember the riches of His grace that He bestows upon you. Not the least of which is Christ's communing with you in His very body and blood of the Sacrament this morning.....!

When we clearly know and review Bible History and the Lord's history played out in your personal life, what will keep you from resolution to make some wonderful spiritual history with your God all the way into eternity!? What will keep you from singing out:

Then here will I and mine today a solemn covenant make and say:

Though all the world forsake Thy Word, I and my house will serve the Lord. Amen!

May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers. My He never leave us or forsake us. May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways. Amen.