

Grace and peace are your, dear friends, from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is one of those Sundays where all the elements come together beautifully to present and reinforce a message so powerful and precious that all human life should stop and partake in the experience. The connection to the Old Testament text is both essential and eternal... and sets the stage for a question in today's context: Who will you serve?

Joshua is the next generation after Moses and Aaron to lead the nation of Israel, but the place where Joshua takes leadership of Israel is not a coincidence. Joshua stands at the very edge and border of the Promised Land; the reality of a place that flows with milk and honey and the destination the Hebrews have dreamt of. Israel now stands on the threshold of their promised future.

Before their foot passes over from the wilderness to the Promised Land, Joshua asks the quintessential question: "WHO WILL YOU SERVE?" But listen my friends, this is not just a question being asked 'out of the blue', this is a question in the context of where the Hebrew people have come and what the nation of Israel has become! From a people in bondage under Pharaoh to the most powerful nation on the face of the earth; Joshua asks these very people, "Who will you serve?"

Before a word is uttered by anyone, Joshua (whom God appointed to lead Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land) declares, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people hear Joshua and offer a testimony of what God has done for them and reply with a similar declaration of service and dedication to God.

There is no question more appropriate or essential for life today; here and now! Who will you serve? The God who has cared, tended, and given His only Son for our life? Who will you serve? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

In the New Testament reading, something goes terrible wrong! The same event is happening not in the physical world this time, but in the context of eternal life when Jesus explains to the disciples and the crowds the need to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. As Jesus offers clarification to His words, instead of crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land of "ETERNAL LIFE", many of the disciples that followed Jesus to this point turn back and follow Jesus no more.

Now, those with faith see, hear, and believe what Jesus is saying and provide the 'ultimate acclamation of faith' that can only come from God imparting to them understanding of who Jesus is. When others walk away, Jesus looks at the twelve remaining and asks them if they also want to leave and Peter alone declares, "To whom shall we go? Lord, you have the words of eternal life."

My dear friends in Christ, we also know what Peter is confessing in this statement of faith and we find comfort, peace, and, strength in understanding the promised land was not merely a destination but the very home that was created for us from the start. In other words, if

we keep looking for something, then it is very possible that we are looking for something that cannot be found...or, we are searching for something that we already have. Put another way; the time searching might better be used in giving thanks for the faith and grace we have already been extended.

Jesus had many disciples or followers at one point, but due to a lack of faith they turned away and went another direction. In the gospel, one turning point for them was the idea of Holy Communion, eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ.

To hear these words outside of the context of faith is strange if not outright disturbing. The people of the day even say, "this teaching is difficult, who can accept it." The answer my friends, is; "those who have faith."

God alone grants faith and faith is planted from hearing the Word of God. You and I alone proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of the reality of God's love for us through Jesus Christ...the LIVING WORD OF GOD.

Let's back up for just a moment...Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God; the Word...made flesh. In the LAW, Leviticus 17 reveals that "life is in the blood" and if the Word of God became Flesh, then blood gave the flesh life. Jesus tells the crowd that flesh and blood will pass away, but the Word of God remains forever, meaning Holy Communion will always be the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, but not in the sense of human form, but in the sense of a divine relationship and connection to our Holy and Almighty Creator.

The Word of God remains forever (the motto of the Reformation and in Latin VDMA). As Marcel Hinrichs celebrates his First Communion among us today, the picture he drew (on the back of the bulletin to represent what Communion means to him) in the purest form says everything we need to know about the power and promise in the Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood, the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Our communion; our intimate relationship of shared feelings, emotions, and experiences with God is only possible because sin has been defeated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Hebrew tradition, the blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled on the altar of the temple...my friends, when Christ died for us, His very blood fell to the ground...the altar of God meaning God is with us here and now and not far away in a heaven in another time and place.

God is here, Christ here, the Spirit is here and you have the faith, understanding, and wisdom to share this great news and eternal hope with the world around you. This is not work, this is our good pleasure to be the people of God who proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom that is come and the peace that passes all understanding to keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Amen.