



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 5, 2023

Pastor Randy Ott

5th Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Joshua 24:14-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 111

Second Lesson: [1 Peter 2:9-12](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

The Savior's Sermon: Let Your Light Shine Choose Serving the Lord

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus:
Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This time last week I was in Encampment, Wyoming with a fresh foot of snow that had just fallen or just finished falling. We were trying to decide whether we were going to leave and drive through it or wait another day. I was talking with someone this morning before church about how when I was younger I thought we should drive through anything. Now that I'm older, I don't even want to walk outside when it's snowing let alone drive in it. Paula always used to tell us not to go when it was bad. Now she is the one that is always eager to go. So we were going to go and then at the last minute she changed her mind and we didn't go. We ended up staying another day. It's kind of funny how things change over time with stuff like that.

Another area I noticed where it really changes is when I go to bed at night. It used to be that I just needed a sheet over me. Now I have four blankets, one of them is weighted, and I'm wondering where the other ones are because I'm always freezing. It used to be that Paula had all these blankets all over her. Now she throws them all off. She likes the light on in the room. I like the light off. She likes the TV on. I like the TV off. It's kind of interesting how things have switched around and all these different choices are made about light or no light as we go to bed, but I guess those kinds of choices don't really matter a whole lot. Eventually I can just put on one of my sermons and fall asleep whether there is light on or not, just like you guys all do. That's just the way it works.

Today God comes to us and he tells us about a choice that makes a big difference, not as far as our salvation because our salvation is never our choice. Think about what Jesus said. ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you...”*** ([John 15:16](#)) God comes to us and gives us the gift of faith. God had gone to the Israelites and made them His chosen people. There was nothing special about them, but God had made them His people. It was His doing, not their doing.

The choice for us is now that God has made us His people, He has given us this gift of faith, are we going to serve the Lord, or are we going to serve other gods? Just like with the Israelites, our choices might not be the gods of the Amorites or the gods of the Egyptians, but there are some gods that we, at times, choose to serve—my own comfort; my own desire not to ruffle feathers or create some problems for myself when I talk with other people. There are all kinds of gods that we choose to serve instead of the One who lived and died in our place.

That choice that was laid in front of the Israelites by Joshua (after they conquered the Promised Land at the end of the Book of Joshua) is the same one that is before us every day of our lives in a lot of the decisions we make every single day—choose who you are going to serve. Choose to serve the Lord is God’s encouragement to us.

For the Israelites, the Psalm we sang today, Psalm 111, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things,” talks about wonderful things God had done and what He does. That’s what Joshua did at the start of [Chapter 24](#). He went through the wonderful things God had done to bring them out of Egypt. The people that had conquered the Promised Land, the ones who had been brought out of Egypt, all died in the 40 years in the wilderness. They didn’t enter the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb. So now Joshua goes over all the things He had done and then he goes over the things they would have known. He talked about the walls of Jericho falling. He talked about how God had driven out the Amorites before them. He talked about the victories God had given them, not because of their strength but because of God doing wonderful things for the people He had chosen. Now Joshua says to them, “This day you have to choose, are you going to serve the LORD who has done all these things I just told you about? Or are you going to serve the gods of the Amorites around you? Are you going to serve the gods of the Egyptians? Are you going to serve some other god? Decide this day. Are you going to serve the LORD?”

If you followed along as I was reading it to you, you may have noticed LORD is in all capital letters. Do you remember what that means in the Old Testament when LORD is in all capital letters? That is Yahweh, the God of grace, the God of the covenant, the God who keeps His promises—the promise that a great descendent would come who would crush the serpent’s head; the promise that God would raise up a prophet like Moses for the people who would be more than Moses. He would be a Savior from sin.

All the way through Joshua was talking about all these things. ***“...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...”*** And he warns them about God’s Law. “You aren’t going to be able to fulfill it. You are sinners. You are going to fail at this at times.” But he is also encouraging them to focus on the LORD, the God of grace who makes and keeps His promises, as the motivation for serving the Lord.

If you know the history of the children of Israel, what comes after Joshua in the Bible is the [Book of Judges](#). The [Book of Judges](#) is kind of ugly. The people worshipped the gods of the Amorites around them. The people fell away from God over and over and over and did not keep this covenant they had made with God. Even though they had said, “We are witnesses. This is what we’re going to do,” they didn’t do it. And they aren’t any different than you and me.

You and I will often choose our own sinful desires, as opposed to what God says is best for us and in His Word. When God gives us a command, it is there to be a blessing to us, not to keep fun out of our lives. It’s there to bless and protect us. It’s part of how He showers His love on His people. He gives us these commands that are good for us. But we would rather follow the god of our own heart and our own desires quite often.

The older I get the more I wake up in the middle of the night, stare at the ceiling, and think about all the times I failed my God. When my God brought in front of me people that I could share Jesus with, at times I didn’t do it because I didn’t want the blow back that often comes with that—someone getting upset with me; someone patting me on the head and telling me that “You’re a superstitious old fool” and calling me a bunch of names. That all happened to me at times. There were times when my God was my own comfort where I wouldn’t do that.

Then you read what it says in here. “God will not forgive you when you rebel against Him.” That gets a little scary! Until you go back to that word, the “LORD.” The LORD is the One who sent His Son into this world to live and die in our place. He didn’t have to. We didn’t earn it. We didn’t deserve it. But He demands holiness of us, so Jesus came and provided that holiness. He demands that sin be paid for because He is a holy, just God, but instead of punishing me or you for our sins, He punished Jesus. That boggles my mind! It shouldn’t be that way and yet that’s what our God did!

The more you and I focus on that, the LORD, this full and free love that He pours out on us, the more we will want to do things that at times are going to make us uncomfortable because they are things He has called us to do. You heard it in the Second Lesson. “You are His chosen people, His special possession, and a holy nation.” That’s what Christ has made you through the work of the Holy Spirit. And now He says that you may declare His praises. You are His vocal chords and He will bring you opportunities to do so. Even if you have failed Him in the past, He will still bring you those opportunities so that you can share Jesus with others.

He did it for me a week ago last night when we were in Encampment. Encampment is a booming town of 100. Right next to it is Riverside, Wyoming, which is a booming town of 50. On that Saturday, they had a winter carnival with all these different events and different things. The Tourist Board gives them money so they hand out prizes if you win. We had a group of about seven and we ended up winning over \$600 on all these different things. And we always think we should spend it locally. Where are you going to spend \$600 locally on a Saturday night? There aren't a whole lot of choices. There are three bars between the two towns, so we went to each one. We had supper at one. Spent money and went to the next one. Then when we got to the last one, I made a new friend.

As I went up to the bar and got a Busch Lite (for some odd reason), Eric the mountain man became my new friend. He was a big guy. He started telling me he has been a logger 20-30 years. He started to tell me his story and he saw me drinking a Busch Lite. He said "You shouldn't be drinking that." He was drinking a Pabst Blue Ribbon and he told me about ten times, "They don't give a blue ribbon for second place!" I heard that story over and over again, but I was laughing and talking with Eric. We were having a good time and I said, "Guess what my profession is." Eric looks at me and sizes me up and says "Carpet layer!" I said "No." He said "Well, I just met some guys from Illinois. They were carpet layers. I thought maybe you were too." I said "No. I take care of a flock." He says "You're a goat farmer?!" I said "No." He says "Jesus!" I said, "Well, you're getting closer." He said "You're something with a church?" I said "Yes, I'm a pastor." "What kind of pastor?" "Lutheran," I said. So we talked about what it meant to be Lutheran—that we say it's all what God did and not anything we do. It's that Jesus did everything. He lived and died in our place.

Then this big man puts his hand on my shoulder and starts crying. His brother had died two weeks before Christmas. He got infected with something or other and they couldn't do anything with it and they finally pulled the plug right before Christmas. He and his mom were there and he was just all torn up because his brother was an atheist. I have this big guy hanging on me, crying, and I said "Well Eric, I'm certainly sorry for your loss. It's easy to see you loved your brother deeply. I can't tell you anything about your brother, but I can tell you that as you go through this grief, and it is grief because there is a loss, Jesus still lived and died in your place and He still loves you. You need to really hang onto that. It's not going to take away your pain, but it will help you get through it." It was interesting, to say the least, but I honestly think that 10 years earlier I wouldn't have talked about Jesus with this guy because of the possibility of a negative response and my own comfort would have kept me from talking about it. But even though I failed my God in the past, God still puts these opportunities in front of us to be His vocal chords. This is what He has called us to do. And we want to do it because we are His special possession. We are a holy nation. He has given us forgiveness and heaven through Jesus.

So what we want to do because He has forgiven us is get better at seeing the chances to lovingly, patiently and kindly share Jesus with all kinds of hurting souls that need it. That includes your brothers and sisters in Christ here. We all need that reminder that our God still loves us, because life in this side of heaven is often incredibly hard. We need to know and we need to be reminded that even though we said we're going to serve the Lord and we haven't, that our God still loves us and He'll equip us to do it better in the future, not because we have to but because we want to since we are His forgiven people. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.