

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, 10:30am

Word for the Week: "You are my hiding place and my shield; I
hope in your word." Psalm 119:114 (NRSV)

Announcements:

Liturgist, Slide 1

- Good Morning! Thank you for worshiping with us today! Here are a few things to be aware of before we get started:

- First, a reminder to submit Joys and Concerns on the bulletin tear offs to help us record them accurately.
- Next, the Trustees will meet on Tuesday night at 6pm.
- Finally, the Pastor has an update on the Hawk Hangout program.
- Pastor: This week, Wednesday, we observe Veterans Day, and since we won't be gathering on that day, could all the Veterans please rise to be recognized?

Prelude

Pianist

Bell Ringer

Live or? Slide 2

Greeting

Pastor, Slide 3

Good Morning Blue Mound! Welcome to the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost! I would again like to express my thanks to all who signed on to deliver a meal to us – they have been delicious, and greatly appreciated. Thanks also for the cards and letters, including those received during Pastor Appreciation month! Let's begin with our:

*** Collect Prayer**

(please rise in body or spirit)

Pastor, Slide 4

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Tech Note: Spotlight Liturgist.

*** Opening Hymn**

"Open My Eyes That I May See", UMH 454

Slides 5-9

L: Please remain standing and turn to page 799 in your hymnals for this morning's Call to Worship from Psalm 78, verses 1-4 and 32-38.

Tech Note: Unmute Liturgist, Mute Pastor

*** Call to Worship:**

Psalm 78, UMH 799

Liturgist, Slide 10

Liturgist: Give ear, O my people, to my teaching: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

All: ² I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,

Liturgist: ³ things that we have heard and known, that our forebears have told us.

All: ⁴ We will not hide them from their children; but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, the might, and wonders God has wrought.

Liturgist: They did not believe in his wonders. ³³ So God made their days vanish like a breath, turned their years into terror.

All: ³⁴ **Whenever God slew them, they would inquire after God, repent, and seek God earnestly.**

Liturgist: ³⁵ They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer,

All: ³⁶ **whom they flattered with their mouths; to whom they lied with their tongues.**

Liturgist: ³⁷ Their heart was not steadfast toward God; they were not true to God's covenant.

All: ³⁸ **Yet God, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them.**

*** Gloria Patri:** **Pianist, Slide 11**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

L: Please be seated and turn to page 472 of your hymnal for our Hymn of Praise

Hymn of Praise **"Near to the Heart of God", UMH 472** **Slides 12-13**

Tech Note: Spotlight "Congregation", Mute Liturgist, Unmute Pastor

Pastoral Reading **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** **Pastor/Liturgist, Slide 14**

Liturgist: This morning we read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, in which we hear Paul's depiction of the true Lord's return, we'll read from the NRSV.

Pastor: ¹³ **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**

Liturgist: ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

Pastor: ¹⁵ **For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.**

Liturgist: ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Pastor: ¹⁷ **Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.**

¹⁸ **Therefore encourage one another with these words.**

Liturgist: The story of God's people.

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

L: Please rise as able and join your voice in affirming our faith through the words of:

***Affirmation of Faith:** **Apostles' Creed** **Liturgist, Slide 15-16**

Liturgist: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Tech Note: Spotlight Pastor's Video.

Passing of the Peace

Pastor, Slide 17

Pastor: *You may stand if you'd like, but please stay in your seats.* In this time of peace, I offer words from 2 John 1:3, "Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love." Peace to you all.

All: Peace to you as well.

Moment of Insight

"Be Prepared" Matthew 25:1-13

Pastor, Slide 18

As a kid, I had mixed results with the scouts. Cub Scouts and Webelos went well, but Boy Scouts? Not so much. We just seemed to have a hard time getting good leaders – once we all packed up for a statewide(?) camp out, but we were the only ones who showed up. Fortunately, our leader had a farm and we were able to camp there instead. I guess we lived up to the Boy Scout motto – Be Prepared – but one has to wonder how the mix up happened in the first place.

In this week's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells the story of another mix up – the story of the ten bridesmaids and their lamps. It's a familiar story: 5 were foolish and 5 were wise. Five brought extra oil, five did not, and those 5 missed the wedding when they had to run out to buy more. Now, one reading of that story is that the 5 with extra oil were selfish – they didn't share when they ran out. What a shame - if this were only about lamps, oil, and a wedding, but Jesus seldom tells a story straight up, does he? When Jesus speaks, be prepared...to think!

Consider this - the light, the lamp, is not just an object of illumination; it represents a life of service and sacrifice. It represents a life transformed by faith in Jesus, by the grace of God. Remember Matt 5:14-16? "You are the light of the world . . . let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your light and give glory to your Father in heaven." The wise bridesmaids lived a life of preparing for the Bridegroom; the foolish ones thought it didn't matter until the last minute. When he finally arrives, they have nothing to show that they belong to him, nothing to shine as a way of living and giving and caring and hoping. Because of the choices they made, he says, "I don't know you."

Being prepared is the sign that we've been paying attention. This story is for those who said yes some time ago and now they need to show a "yes-worthy" life. The wise bridesmaids didn't share their oil because they couldn't. You can't share acts of love. Each has to do her own. We have to do our own. Each has to participate according to the grace given them, to use the gifts received.

We can't ride their coattails into the kin-dom; we can't rely on someone else's lamp to light our way. That's just not how it works. Certainly, we can share; certainly, we can teach and mentor; and certainly, we are better together than any of us is alone. But in the end, we have to trim our own lamps; we have to burn our own oil, we have to make our own choices. That is the work that must be done. We listen for the shout at midnight that will recognize Christ

among us. Keep your lamps trimmed and burning; the work is almost done. Thanks be to God. Amen.¹

Tech Note: Spotlight Liturgist's Video, Unmute Liturgist, Mute Pastor.

Scripture Reading

Joshua 24:1-3a,14-25

Slide 19

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.

² And 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. 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.

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.

¹⁵ Now 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."

¹⁶ Then the people answered, "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."

¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." ²¹ And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" ²² Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." ²³ He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

²⁴ The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Tech Note: Spotlight Pastor's Video, Unmute Pastor, Mute Liturgist.

Pastor: Stop Screen Share, Switch to local mic.

Message:

"Fair Warning"

Pastor, Slide 19

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/there-is-now/twenty-third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-preaching-notes>

As I begin this morning's message, please join me in prayer: Lord God, Pour out your Spirit on the words I am about to share, make them your own, find them pleasing, I pray, that they may nourish Your people, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Page 1 - The Issue Today/Intro Story:

This is a season of choices, an election recently completed – well, the election anyway, if not the counting. Choices made on ballots, choices made before those ballots cast – to vote early, by mail, in person. Choices made regarding our personal safety, the virus: wear a mask or not, go shopping or not, dine in or carryout only. So many choices these days, it is enough to cause a headache at the minimum. But we've all made plenty of choices in our lives – some more important than others.

I'd love to spend some time talking about the biggest choices you've ever faced! Jobs, weddings - would anyone care to share a short story about a choice they faced?

Most of you have heard most of the story about my decision to go the seminary, so I won't repeat that one, but there is another from early in my return to the church, which began on Christmas Eve of 1998. I was surprised how comfortable I felt being back in the pews that first Sunday morning back in Mascoutah. I didn't want any attention drawn to me, and none was paid. Life was good.

And then came assignment season – we had an older, much beloved, Pastor, and it was announced that he would retire, and a new pastor would be assigned. This generated the usual concern, as folks were quite comfortable with the way things were; no one likes change. But change was coming, and unbeknownst to us, the new Pastor was coming to "Transform the Church." We didn't know what that meant, we were not prepared for it in any way, but folks were sure that they weren't going to like it once they found out

And sure enough, as leadership positions began to change – some seemingly life-long positions – there were rumors of unrest. There was talk of new ministries, perhaps new lines of thought and theology being expressed, I don't know, I hadn't been there long enough to know the history.

In any case, the unrest quickly became open rebellion, lines were drawn, the District Superintendent called in – letters to the Bishop. When it became clear that nothing was going to change, the opposition decide to split. People with long family ties to the church, generations invested in its care and upkeep, first decided that they would not support the church with their tithes and offerings, and then decided to take their presence somewhere else. Being new to the church, and the area, my family was invited to the meeting where that decision was made. It was held in the home of a long-time member, arguments made, grievances aired. At some point, I don't remember what was said to trigger my actions, but I stood in the middle of the room, filled with folks I had once admired, and told them that the Kriesel Household would stand with the Pastor, remaining with the church.

It was one of the boldest things I'd ever done, and surprisingly, people seemed to respect me for it, even as they went off in different directions, moving to different churches.

As you might guess, there is a lot more to this story, but we'll save it for another time. The interesting thing about this experience is that in the end, the Pastor had accomplished what he had come to do - although it would take several more years to see the results. You see, he had come to transform us into a disciple-making church, no longer a comfortable fortress for the generations of family members who visited on Sunday mornings. In the end, that little church sent disciples out in many new directions, to many different churches, creating room for the growth to come. As I said, the story continues, but our time for it does not, so let's turn our attention to Joshua.

Page 2 - Exploring the Text/Context:

This morning's reading comes at the end of the Book, and the life, of Joshua. When we last checked in with God's People, Moses had been to the mountain top, seen the Promised Land, and died, leaving Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan. The lectionary chose to skip over the story in between, but leaves us with this story, complete with perhaps Joshua's most famous words, "but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." That line resonated with me – I am nothing compared to Joshua and all he faced, and yet, that moment in that room felt very much like a Joshua moment. A choice was made that day – a choice to stick with a church that had so recently accepted me as I was: a sinner among sinners. I had recognized that I needed to be in the church with and for my family, and I recognized that I needed to be involved in the work of the church, that church, and not be part of an anger-driven exodus. I was, and am, no saint, but time seems to be saying that I made the right decisions.

So, having skipped over the entire book of Joshua to arrive at the end, perhaps a bit of an update is due: after sending out spies, Joshua led the people across the Jordan River, after stopping the river's flow in a manner recalling Moses' parting of the Red Sea. Many battles transpired, and finally the 12 tribes received the land granted to them, cities were designated as places of refuge and for the Levites.

There were disagreements, not everything went smoothly, but the Israelites lived in peace for many years and Joshua grew old. In Chapter 23 an aging Joshua gathered "all Israel, their elders and heads, their judges and officers," and addressed them – I'll let you read that on your own, but the gist of it was: look at all God has done for you. If you continue to be faithful, God will remain faithful – but be careful, because if you let your guard down, things will not go well for you. It wasn't a threat: it was a statement of truth. The next step was a formal covenant ceremony at Shechem, bringing us to today's reading.

Page 3 - The Text Today/Exegesis:

You've heard the words, and I thank Gregg for reading them, that was a long passage and not, necessarily, a lot of fun to read. It was serious business. Joshua was about to die,

leadership was about to change, decisions had to be made. Would the people continue on the course set out for them by Moses and Aaron and Eleazar, and Joshua, or would they follow their own paths, dividing a nation that had worked so hard to get where it was? An interesting question in **this** time and place in history, where our democracy is being tested, even as it was an important question for a people who had followed God to a promised land.

In the opening verses of our reading, Joshua gains the full attention of those who have gathered. "...Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel..." (v2). This is serious business, no time for "sort of" paying attention. God was with them from the very beginning – even before they even knew The One God, when they worshipped and served other Gods. This changed with Abraham, from whom many offspring would flow, but they had slipped.

Joshua's words were deep and meaningful – even for all that Gregg read, there were more: verses 4-13. I recommend those verses for after church reading, as Joshua makes a pretty powerful case: God has done much for you! Everything! Nothing you have, came through your own efforts, only through God! The Israelites had been through a multi-generational struggle to get where they were, and they were being asked to acknowledge this – could we do it today?

Can we honestly look at all we have, and all we have done, and credit it to God? That is what they were being asked. It is the same question we are being asked now, today. If God gave, then do we not owe God our loyalty and our service – by whatever means God has given us? {Pause}

As we rejoin our reading, Joshua speaks boldly, "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. {Pause} ¹⁵ Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve..." (NRSV).

Remember, this is a covenant ceremony, like a wedding, the people are being asked to make a choice, a commitment, although there was no real choice at all, was there? There was the God of victory who had brought them so far, or the defeated gods who had been unable to do anything. It's an obvious choice, but we all know folks who regularly mess up when faced with an obvious choice. I chose to stay back and clean the barracks my first Sunday in Basic Training. Even if I wasn't interested in what the chaplain had to say on Sunday mornings, going to chapel and hanging around with the female recruits had to be better than staying back and cleaning the barracks. So even if there isn't really a choice to be made, Joshua lays it on the line: "Choose this day whom you will serve!" And then he hammers it home, "...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (verse 15). You can almost hear those words coming from Mel Gibson's mouth in a scene much like the one in the movie "Braveheart." The time has come to lay it on the line!

As in the movie, the people rise to the challenge, affirming that they will not serve another god and declaring, "...we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." We've all made

that choice, right? That's why we are here, right? We recognize what God has done for us, right? And yet, we face that question every day, don't we? Whom will we serve today? No matter how far we've gone, no matter how long we live, we face that question each morning when we rise. It seems an easy choice, one we've made for years, almost without thought. Hmm, maybe the ease with which we make that choice should be considered a warning – a fair warning indeed.

Page 4 - The Good News/Summary/Takeaways:

Joshua offers fair warning to the Israelites as well, saying, "You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins." It sounds as though Joshua is trying to change their minds, to discourage them, but that is not his goal. Instead he is making it clear just how serious a commitment they are making. How serious a choice.

How often do we tell someone, "Yeah, I'll be there, I'll do that" when we have no intent to follow through? It's easier to make a non-specific positive response than to actually commit, one way or another. Joshua is not letting them get away with an easy, though insincere, yes. "No, we will serve the Lord!" (v.21) they shout in response to his challenge.

Joshua holds them to their word, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they affirm their choice: "We are witnesses." The matter has been decided, the commitment made, the gavel banged, the future of the Israelites has been sealed. But remember, committing doesn't always mean success; it only means we'll try. We, like the Israelites, will need God's forgiveness and grace, time and time again to get it right.²

Finally, the ceremony comes to an end. Commitments have been made, final instructions must be given and acknowledged. Joshua tells them, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.' [and] ²⁴ The people said to Joshua, 'The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.'"

Foreign gods – that doesn't apply to me, does it? I don't worship little statues, I only worship the One True God - in three persons, of course, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – but only one God. Finally, a verse that doesn't apply to me!! I'm joking of course, and so is anyone else who makes that statement.

Each and every one of us have, and have had, so many foreign gods in our lives: money, relationships, possessions, politics and personal beliefs.³ Positions we have held for years, fully assured that we are right. Things that we place above our commitment to God. Those are the choices we make.

² Devotional, Nov 5, 2020, www.d365.org.

³ Ibid

But just as some of the bridesmaids made good choices, and some, not so good – choices that were made over a lifetime, not just on the night of the wedding – each of us have choices we must make. Some of our choices will be good and upright some will miss the mark.

Fortunately, “The future of God’s people [in Joshua’s time and now] depend not on the people’s sincerity, faithfulness or obedience. [Our sincerity, faithfulness and obedience.] No, the future ultimately depends on God -- God’s faithfulness, God’s mercy, God’s powerful word, God’s transformation of the heart. God’s saving grace. Israel would later be exiled for centuries of forsaking God. But, in the end God would bring Israel back to the land. Not because of who the people were, but because of who God was...and who God is.⁴ That’s a pretty fair warning. Let’s pray: Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, forgive us when we slip from the commitment we’ve made to you, and guide the choices we make. All honor and glory are yours. Amen.

At the conclusion of the message:

Liturgist: As you listen to this morning’s offertory reflect on the worshipful act of giving back to our Lord. Think about what you have received as blessings, and how you can bless others in return. Amen

Pastor: Start Screen Share, Switch to Yeti Mic.

Stewardship Moment: Please continue to support our mission by mailing your tithes and offerings to the church (PO Box 375, Blue Mound, IL 62513). Thank you.

Offertory

Slide 20

Doxology/Offertory Prayer:

Slide 21

Ever vigilant God, you watch over us every night as we sleep and every day as we rise to do our work and as we gather at tables to feast on the food you provide. Your care for us is never ceasing. We long to be as vigilant as we strive to be the kingdom-ready church you desire here on earth. Help us to keep our eyes and ears open to the needs around us. May we give so generously that when it is time to close our eyes in sleep, we will rest knowing we have been faithful and vigilant in our caring and compassion. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

(Matthew 25:1-13)

Joys and Concerns:

Slide 22

(Please forward joys and concerns to Pastor via Zoom Chat function, by phone at 692-2543, or at kdkriesel@gmail.com.)

Prayer Hymn:

“Be Still, My Soul” UMH 534

Slide 23-24

Pastoral Prayer

Slide 25

⁴ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3465

You let us choose, O God, between you and the false gods of this world. In the midst of the night of sin and death, wake us from our slumber and call us forth to greet Christ, so that with eyes and hearts fixed on him, we may follow to eternal light, ready to be welcomed into your heavenly kingdom with open arms.

Remind us, O God, that we do not have to wait until that unknown time to experience your kingdom. That you have challenged us to create it here on earth, as we will soon pray. Remind us of our responsibility to You and to each other. Remind us of your love for all you have created. Remind those who lead us that you are the source of their power, and of your expectation that they act with your Justice in mind.

Gracious and loving God, you fill our lives with so many good things, and stay with us through good and bad. We give thanks for all the ways you light our path and keep us in the ways of hope, as with joy we lift up: _____ and with concern: _____,

Joys: (New Business Opening??)

Concerns: Tara Jaukkuri (Surgery on her neck)

Continuing: Dorothy Kriesel (Recovery after Surgery), Brian Damery (Heart Issues), John Holmgren (Heart Issues), Wildfire Victims; Tropical Storm/Hurricane Victims, Dorothy Damery (Health); Maurine Severns (Eyes), Justice in our nation; All affected by COVID 19; Carol Acree, Diane Elder, Doris Bonn, Tom Vaughn, Vic Oxby, Don Younker, Bob Perona, Our Government, Local, State, and National Leaders; First Responders, Members of the Military, Our Bishop (Frank Beard), Our District Superintendent (Brad Watkins), The United Methodist Church.

Those Unable to Join us in Worship: Dorothy Damery (Primrose), Doris Bonn (At Home), Martha Sheppard (Imboden Creek Gardens), Gene Grandfield (At Home), Eleanor Moma (At Home).

As we have proclaimed our joys and concerns let us now take to the Lord those things, which we wish to keep between God and ourselves in a time of silent prayer.

(Silent Prayer)

Make us instruments of your peace, O Lord, so that where there is hatred, we can love, and where there is unrest we have your peace. In the peace of your Son, Jesus the Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

LORD'S PRAYER:

Slide 25

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

***Hymn of Commitment**

"O Jesus, I Have Promised" UMH 396

Slide 26-28

Benediction - Closing Hymn - Postlude - Community Time

Slide 29