

# PENTECOST 24

## *Proper 27 - Year A*

*This Bible study was written by Victoria Lewis of EDS@Union.*

### **Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25**

**24** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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,

<sup>14</sup> “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. <sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.” <sup>21</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of

Israel.” <sup>24</sup> The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” <sup>25</sup> So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

### **Commentary from Victoria Lewis**

“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.” While Joshua’s intensity in our reading might make us uncomfortable, I wonder if there might be merit to what he’s saying. Joshua is warning the Israelites to not make a loose commitment. Following the Lord, he explains, is not a commitment lightly made or easily broken; if they are to make the commitment, they must be fully invested. The Israelites respond by ensuring that they are willing to enter into and obey God’s covenant. Joshua immediately called them to act upon their words, showing their commitment and dedication by no longer worshiping foreign gods and focusing their devotion on God. Serving God is not just an intellectual exercise but also an intention coupled with action.

Choosing to serve God should not be taken lightly. We are our own witnesses to our faith and practice. We choose our own level of accountability, but Joshua warns us, as he warns the Israelites, that following God requires our whole selves.

### **Discussion Questions**

We are our own witnesses to our spiritual commitments, and yet our tradition encourages us to live our faith in community. Do you have accountability partners, official and otherwise, for your spiritual and religious practice(s)?

How do you “**incline your heart**” to God? What does that practice look like for you?

## Psalm 78:1-7

- <sup>1</sup> Hear my teaching, O my people; \*  
incline your ears to the words of my  
mouth.
- <sup>2</sup> I will open my mouth in a parable; \*  
I will declare the mysteries of ancient  
times.
- <sup>3</sup> That which we have heard and known, and what  
our forefathers have told us, \*  
we will not hide from their children.
- <sup>4</sup> We will recount to generations to come the  
praiseworthy deeds and the power of the  
LORD, \*  
and the wonderful works he has done.
- <sup>5</sup> He gave his decrees to Jacob and established a  
law for Israel, \*  
which he commanded them to teach their  
children;
- <sup>6</sup> That the generations to come might know, and  
the children yet unborn; \*  
that they in their turn might tell it to their  
children;
- <sup>7</sup> So that they might put their trust in God, \*  
and not forget the deeds of God, but keep  
his commandments;

### Commentary from Victoria Lewis

The first verses of Psalm 78 focus not only on the need to remember the stories of God's people but also on the necessity of teaching future generations. The psalmist will "declare the mysteries of ancient times" that the community knows, since these stories, both good and bad, were shared with them by their ancestors. Their cultural identity is defined by these ancient, shared stories that create communal interests and common cultural and religious practices. The psalmist does not just emphasize teaching the commandments but also teaching the interactions of God with God's people – the praiseworthy deeds and the wonderful works God has done. Just as parents pass down familial stories, the psalmist insists that the current generation must share their communal stories with future generations. We have a responsibility to continue the knowledge of our collective history, learn from our mistakes, and put our trust in God.

### Discussion Questions

What are the shared stories of your community or communities?

What do you hope future generations will learn from us? What stories are we passing on?

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### Commentary from Victoria Lewis

Grief is a powerful emotion. It has the ability to rip us apart at the seams, connect us to the forgotten parts of ourselves, and anything in between. It can be a messy and overwhelming emotion, affecting all aspects of our lives. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul attempts to comfort the community on the loss of their fellow believers. He assures them that their friends and loved ones haven't missed out on Jesus' return, the great event they are all anticipating. Paul enjoins them not to grieve without hope. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, we too hope for our own resurrection. We are confident that this world is not the end, and that we will be without pain and reunited with our creator in the afterlife. We can't escape grief, but we can know that God will be with us in our sorrow. Grief will not have the final word. As Christ-followers, we hope for a life to come – a life after death, and a life through grief.

### Discussion Questions

Do you imagine there to be a life after grief? Is grief something you can move through to the other side? How does grief change over time?

When have you felt God's presence in your grief?  
When have you felt alone?

## Matthew 25:1-13

25 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten young women took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those young women got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Later the other young women came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

### Commentary from Victoria Lewis

What a strange parable Jesus offers us. Ten bridesmaids are waiting to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding banquet. Five have come prepared with extra oil, knowing the possibility that they might have to wait. The other five do not. They ask the wise bridesmaids to share their oil, but they say no. Now what happened to “girls supporting girls”?! At first glance, there seems to be no solidarity among the young women – but it’s a bit more complicated than that. The wise bridesmaids didn’t have enough to share, knowing it was better for five lamps to guide the whole way than for all ten to run out of oil partway through the journey. Only five had the preparation and wisdom to get the task done.

The parable shows the importance of individual preparedness and personal investment in our communal creation of the Kingdom of God. Your friend can have a sustaining prayer life and pray for you, but she can’t pray *for* you. Your church participating in antiracist racial reconciliation work doesn’t mean you’re off scot-free on your own internal work. Our relationships with the divine are our own, and our contributions to bringing the Kingdom of God are our own. Our faith is to be lived out in community, but we cannot rely on others to prepare us for the Kingdom. There is a delicate balance between communal responsibility and being a critical and active member of that community. We can be ready, or we can be untrusting, unaware, and unprepared to do our part.

### Discussion Questions

When have you been a wise bridesmaid? When have you been a foolish one?

What areas of your life need extra attention and preparation?