

**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**40 N. Main St., Hatfield, PA 19440**  
**215-855-4676 + [gracelutheranhatfield.org](http://gracelutheranhatfield.org)**

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, August 22, 2021  
Sermon: "Whose Life is Yours, Anyway?" (Joshua 24:15)  
Pastor Nancy M. Raabe

Let's start with a little story, one that involves a bit of text omitted in today's reading from Joshua 24. If you look at your bulletin you'll see that the lectionary gives us only Joshua 24:2a. Then it jumps to verse 14. But I want to read you 24:2 in full, which includes what we might call part 2b. Here's how the whole verse goes:

*<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.*

It's the serving other gods I want to talk about today, and we must begin with Terah because Joshua did.

Who was Terah? Well, he was Abraham's father – or Abram, as he is first known in Genesis. We know this because he turns up in various genealogies in the Bible. But who was Terah, really?

Jewish history, or midrash, tells us he was an idol worshipper par excellence. Terah not only worshipped idols, he made statues of them and sold them each day out of his storefront. Legend has it that one day Terah needed to leave his store, so he put his son Abram in charge. But Abram, who was soon to receive a call from the one true God, discouraged customers from buying these idols, explaining to them the futility of worshipping statues that had been made only that very day.

But this wasn't enough for Abram. That same day he grabbed an ax and destroyed all but the largest of his father's idols. Then he wedged the ax into the hand of that remaining statue. When Terah returned and saw what had happened, he accused Abram. But Abram explained that the largest idol had broken all the others in a fight over an offering that a woman had brought to the store. Terah exclaimed that such a thing was impossible. He then realized that his son had tricked him into admitting that his idols were powerless.

Polytheism, or the worship of multiple gods, was common in the ancient Near East. People worshiped the gods of the place in which they lived. Order was imposed on nature by putting different gods in charge in charge of different things. But Joshua had been commissioned by Yahweh, the one true God, to lead the people at last into the land God had promised them. In Chapter 24 Joshua lists all that God enabled him to do to conquer Canaan so that the Israelites could inhabit the rich land. But all around them the temptation remained to worship the Canaanite gods. Joshua knew they could come together as a people only if they worshiped the one true God.

What's interesting is that Joshua makes clear in verse 15 that he knows this may be something the people do not want to do. The original Hebrew reads something like this: Not "If you are unwilling, but "If it seems evil in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."

What idols do you worship? Whose life is yours, anyway? Whose disciple does your life show you to be? In whom or what do you place your ultimate allegiance?

How about our identity? If we allow our well-being to be determined by our social media following, our position at work, or our achievements, it will all come crashing down at some point.

How about money? For some, the pursuit of wealth is their only goal in life. As we know, evil is rooted not in money but in the love of money. Just like with the rich man who built bigger barns to store up his wealth, it too can all come crashing down at any time.

How about our cell phones? Who among us immediately feels lost if our phones get misplaced? .... Who has even said, "I couldn't live without my phone?"

I don't mean to make light of all this. Where our allegiance lies is a deadly serious matter, as the author of Ephesians makes clear. Our struggle isn't against things we can see but "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Why? Because when death is staring you in the face, literally or figuratively, you can't look for what you need on your cellphone, or in your bank account, or on your trophy shelf. Just like people of Israel under Joshua, I think we face this temptation every day of our lives. Whose life is yours, anyway? As Bob Dylan put it, "You're gonna have to serve somebody." [excerpt was played]

The fact is that God has given us freedom so complete that we can go and serve another thing, or god, or person, anytime we choose. This should terrify us because the consequences of serving a false god will always be devastating. Just like with Terah, at some point you will realize that the idols you had been serving are powerless.

So with Joshua, take this opportunity to view the panorama of your life. Whose disciple does your life show you to be? What are your daily concerns? Where do you commit the resources that God has given you? What words do you speak? Do you serve the gods of power, wealth, anger, or fear? Or is your ultimate allegiance to the one who gave his life for us out of a love that is as deep, broad, and high as the cosmos itself? Is your life a new testament to that love?

Lord, to whom can we go? Peter nails it in his powerful confession today:

"You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Amen.