

ENGAGING PASSION - NEVERTHELESS WE PERSIST

Ordinary Time

Joshua 24, Selected Verses

A Sermon Preached by
Pastor Catherine Foote
University Congregational United Church of Christ
Seattle, Washington 98125
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Scripture – Read by Liturgists

As we seek to respond to your word and will, and encourage one another in the growth of our minds and spirits, let us hear this morning's Scripture from Joshua 24.

Joshua 24, selected verses¹

¹Then 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. ²And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ³Then I took Abraham and Sarah from beyond the River and led them through all the land of Canaan and made their children many. ... ⁵Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out....

¹⁴"Now therefore worship and serve God in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served before the River and in Egypt, and serve God. ¹⁵... [C]hoose this day whom you will serve, ... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

¹⁶Then the people answered, ... ¹⁷"It is ... 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 [and] protected us along all the way that we went. ... ¹⁸[W]e also will serve the Lord, who is our God."... ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Pastor Catherine Foote

Will you join me in prayer

God,
May the words of my mouth,
May the meditations of our hearts be strength for following you,
Be met with you, our Rock and our Redeemer.
— Amen.

¹ Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Old Testament. ©1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. .

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Well, most of you probably already know the story from which the title of this sermon comes: passion. Nevertheless we persist. Of course, it doesn't matter your political affiliation; you recognize that story of persistence: Elizabeth Warren speaking before the Senate in a confirmation hearing of a fellow Senator and reading to the Senate the words of Coretta Scott King, words that were in fact already a part of the Congressional record.*² [I almost said Congregational record.] And she was stopped. And, in fact, as she was stopped Mitch McConnell raised an objection and said, "These words shouldn't be read and used at this time." But Elizabeth Warren continued and Mitch McConnell stopped the conversation again and called for a vote. And Elizabeth Warren was voted into silence. And after that moment Mitch McConnell was asked why he did what he did. And he said, "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless she persisted." Wow!

Those words, of course, took off. They were adopted by many around the country and around the world for that long-term vision of justice, of raising our voices and the voices of those who've been silenced, the voices of those who were on the margins and are on the margins still, the voices of those who have been warned, who been given an explanation, who nevertheless persist.

And so we come to this interesting story at the end of the book of Joshua, the Joshua who took the mantle from the leadership of Moses and brought the people into the Promised Land that Moses had only seen from a distance. I would like to suggest in those Bibles we gave the kids this morning and the Bibles you have in your pews, in the Bibles you read at home, this story of Joshua is a *pivotal point* in those Hebrew Scriptures. Up until this point God is the one who has persisted. Over and over again God has shown up to call the people, to lead them forward, to lead them into the Promised Land. And for all the problematic parts of that story -- and there are some problematic points of that story -- God is seen as the one who persists. I like to imagine maybe God was warned about this whole creation idea. *Perhaps* God was given an explanation somewhere in the midst of this about what and why and how we would be with God. And yet as the story goes, God persists.

So here we stand in the Promised Land and Joshua lays out the choices: You can go backward to those gods you knew before -- beyond the Euphrates, the gods in Egypt. You can go back, but as for me and my house we will serve God.

Now this statement that Joshua makes is not about serving *any* god. The statement that Joshua makes is about serving *this* God -- Yahweh, the God we have come to know, the God who persists, the God who the prophets would describe as doing justice and loving mercy and calling us to do the same as we walk humbly with *that* God. Well, of course, that brings us to right here and right now and this community, because you've heard it said already: we are the people who suggest that we "meet hate with reconciling love." *That* God. We are the people who suggest that we "reject the false gods of said society, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus." *That* God. As for me and my house we will follow God.

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-elizabeth-warren-senate-rules-20170207-story.html> Accessed 10/24/2018

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I said this story of Joshua what is a pivotal point in the story of the Hebrew Scriptures, because after that proclamation the whole rest of the story is about the people *and* God persisting. So very shortly after they make that declaration "we will serve God," they stumble. They stumble. Just like me. And prophets come to remind them you said you would follow God not the false gods of society. *That* God the one who longs for you has only these requirements for you: love justice, be merciful, walk humbly with *that* God. *That's* the God we stand and proclaim that we will follow.

Now in Scripture it's told as just a moment. Right? At the end of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But we know don't we? It's not just a moment. It's not just a moment in our lives when we made that proclamation and we don't ever have to make it again, because we're on the path and we know right where were going and *nothing's* gonna stop us! Unh. Now it's not a moment, is it? We said our face toward justice. We set our heart toward mercy. We imagine that we will be the people who meet hate with reconciling love.

And right alongside that proclamation to persist stands exhaustion. Right? Boy, have you not been exhausted through these weeks and months and maybe through a lifetime of rejecting the false gods of society to not make any mistakes. Those false gods have power. Hm? Hey, wealth get it! Get it anyway you can and hold onto it it's the only security you will know in this world.

Get power and hold onto it it's the only way you'll achieve anything in this world. Who And, whatever you do, do *not* let the stranger in. You never know what the stranger will do. And if you want to stay safe and if you want to stay secure and if you want to be wealthy and healthy and wise, follow these Gods, I hear it every day.

And, oh my goodness, when I have tried to resist those gods, I am warned. People are more than willing to explain to anyone of us who have set our hearts on that path why that path won't really work. That we hear from all sides. ou want to meet hate with reconciling love? You'll never get there -- you gotta meet hate with hate! If they are coming at you, go back at them harder. Walter Wink calls it "the myth of redemptive violence" but we could call it "the myth of redemptive greed," the myth of redemptive wealth, "the myth that anything might redeem us other than the love of God who meets us every day with justice and mercy."

The work we do and the work we're called to do is exhausting and as much as we like to say it every week "we will meet hate with reconciling love" we know when we walk out that door, what we face will exhaust us and those voices that will warn us that will explain to us why love is not what will reconcile us -- but what we have to do is choose sides and stay on those sides is what will save us. It is exhausting! I get exhausted. Let's just say it to one another we come together as a hopeful, tired people. What do you do with the exhaustion? If you are going to persist, what is it? What you do with that sense that whatever you do, it doesn't seem to make a difference; that whoever you are, you can be dismissed; that the gods out there are more powerful than any name we gather in in here?

First, I think you just say it to say the truth to each other right? The truth to each other: we get tired. Sometimes I show up here energized and sometimes I just barely make it here. And sometimes I can't get here. Sometimes we will miss someone who has just gotten too tired

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along the way. Let's say, let's say that out loud, "The work we, do the persistence we call for, it's exhausting. Don't imagine it will only happen once you've made up your mind and you'll never turn back. The strongest among us will get tired. We will grow weary."

The second thing I know about that exhaustion is that getting here and hearing the encouraging words from each other and from God makes a difference. That's why at the back of our bulletins we are giving you the opportunity to encourage each other you may or may not ever use the back of that bulletin with the little space for the note, but I hope you will take a moment to say, "Be of good courage." Be of good courage. Keep walking in that path of justice and mercy and faithfulness, because your word of encouragement has made a difference to me when it looked like I couldn't go on, I open a note in my mailbox and someone took the time to say, "Thank you for what you do. Keep doing what you do." Your word that you thought went into an empty void landed right here in my heart and made a difference to me.

Remember, these words of Joshua are an over and over invitation again --it's not just one moment. So find those places where you can stand, you can take a deep breath, and you can say, "As for me and my house we will serve God. *That* God: the one who longs for justice, who cares for the environment, who stands with the marginalized, who refuses to give in to other voices, who knows what matters most. We *will* engage this passion and we *will* persist."

-- Amen

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