

PENTECOST 14

Proper 16 - Year B

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Joshua 24:1-2a,14-18

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. 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.

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.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

I once read a booklet, published in the 1940s, full of stories, jokes, and anecdotes written from an evangelical perspective. One of the stories told of a small curiosity shop in which stood, among various other items, religious statues from around the world. While the language is not particularly polite to our modern ears, one brass statue was marked, “Hindu Idol”. Another, of a bearded man bearing an ax, was marked, “Norse Idol”. At the end of a short line of these statues sat a dollar bill, with the inscription, “American Idol”. Idolatry is not some long-ago and far-away practice that only needed to be considered by the children of Israel at Shechem. It needs to be a constant consideration for those who seek to follow our Lord.

Discussion Questions

What idols exist in your life? How can you turn from them and back toward God?

Psalm 34:15-22

- ¹⁵ The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, *
and his ears are open to their cry.
- ¹⁶ The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, *
to root out the remembrance of them from
the earth.
- ¹⁷ The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them *
and delivers them from all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The Lord is near to the brokenhearted *
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.
- ¹⁹ Many are the troubles of the righteous, *
but the Lord will deliver him out of them all.
- ²⁰ He will keep safe all his bones; *
not one of them shall be broken.
- ²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked, *
and those who hate the righteous will be
punished.
- ²² The Lord ransoms the life of his servants, *
and none will be punished who trust in him.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

In a world marked by human-built injustice, cruelty, warfare, bigotry, and fear, is it any wonder we take refuge in God's promises to redeem pain? The problems of the ancient Near East are, as above, not so far removed from us as we would like. Who of us has not experienced evil, trouble, or crushed spirits? Who of us does not long for deliverance or a friendly, listening ear? Luckily for us, the longing is not the end; just as it was true for our forebears, it is true for us: God cares. While we sometimes need to wait for redemption, and sometimes it doesn't come exactly as we'd like, it *does* come.

Discussion Questions

Do you ever pray for God's justice and deliverance?

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; ¹¹ put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, ¹² for our struggle is not against blood and flesh 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. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, and belt your waist with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness ¹⁵ and lace up your sandals in preparation for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Paul's words, while inspirational, can be hard for us to hear and even harder to put into practice. My worship preference involves some loud organ music, an inspirational sermon, and some transcendence of the normal, everyday world. Knowing that, I'm not going to be *unrighteous*, but do I really need to put on a breastplate each Sunday? Yes, I do. I have to put on this whole get-up because Paul is right. Our worship can be transcendent and stunningly beautiful and majestic, but whatever the trappings, it *must* point us toward the mission God gives us, his followers. We will confront lies with truth; we will overcome wickedness with righteousness. Standing against evil – which has an unfortunate propensity for fighting back – is not for the faint of heart!

Discussion Questions

Why do you think Paul uses martial metaphors in this selection?

John 6:56-69

⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Just like last week, Jesus says something truly shocking: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” We hear from John that this was enough to turn many followers away, and it’s not hard to understand why! But like the faithful few who continued on with him, we almost have no choice but to believe – whether he does things exactly as we like or not, this Jesus has the words of eternal life. We might find, that no matter how far we go astray, we are drawn back into the orbit of the God-man, the Messiah. Who knows us like him? Who strengthens and challenges us like him? Who gives us a vision of the good like him? Put simply: To whom else can we go?

Discussion Questions

When you receive communion, do the words jar you, or have you perhaps heard them so many times that they barely register?