

04.06.25 ~ Lent 5

“Submission: Called to Hospitality”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Joshua 24:14-20, 24-26 ^{NIV}

¹⁴ “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, 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 to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷ It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.”

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

Leader: These Words of Submission Are from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

John 12:1-8 ^{GNT}

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, the man he had raised from death. ² They prepared a dinner for him there, which Martha helped serve; Lazarus was one of those who were sitting at the table with Jesus.

³ Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house. ⁴ One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot—the one who was going to betray him—said, ⁵ “Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would help himself from it.

⁷ But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! Let her keep what she has for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me.”

Leader: These Words of Service Are of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Loving and faithful God, we have journeyed with Jesus during this Lenten season, studying your word through prayer, devotions, and fasting. We realize we are unprepared yet come to you anyway a bit like Joshua's people – distracted, unfocused, and yet eager to serve you in some way. This week let us put all expectations and worries aside to surrender to your love and sacrifice. Fill our hearts and minds with your words of surrender, teaching, and preparation, encouraging us along the way. Speak through this messenger's words as you renew and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Next week is Palm Sunday! So, I invite you to start your Easter celebration with us next Sunday and sign up for the Good Friday "Disciples' Lunch" with the Lord's Supper (recognizing Maundy Thursday), and our annual Contemplative service of Scripture, Singing, and Prayer in the Fellowship Hall at noon on Friday. Then we'll regather Resurrection Sunday at our normal Bible Study and Worship times. I understand we will have some special music as well. Hope you can "surrender" some of your schedule.

Although today's Hebrew Scripture references covenant, we will not read our church covenant today, but rather on April 27th when we recognize the 22nd Anniversary of our consolidation as The United Baptist Church. Today, as you hear the brief teaching, be thinking about how Joshua's words impact our own beliefs and covenant.

The book of Joshua is named for the man who led Israel into Canaan after Moses died. His name means "Yahweh is salvation." Joshua was a forerunner of our savior Jesus. As you heard in the Scripture, Joshua is preaching to the twelve tribes about the Lord's mighty works throughout their short history. He reminds his people how much they needed God to send someone like Moses to protect and deliver them from

the ruthless hands of Pharaoh. They were Israel after all, the people of the Lord, yet had forgotten this important status, and succumbed to the many gods (with a little “g”) of whatever territory they settled. Joshua was trying to keep the unity of the tribes in words, thought, and deed. With these new lands, Joshua tried to remind them of the costs they and their fathers had witnessed: plagues, war, fear, jealousy, and now the rewards of having a united community.

Would they worship the one true God in submission to his care or continue with the Amorite gods? Joshua delivered the hard news that they must choose because Yahweh is a holy, jealous God and would hold them accountable for their sin. Joshua wanted his people to throw away the foreign gods with no ambivalence, only a firm commitment to Yahweh. His idea of a covenant would stipulate that they agree to submit to his commandments before they could serve him. They did agree to a covenant and a shrine, both to be a witness to their submission and willingness to serve on God’s terms. Even though they eventually fell away from obedience, this passage reminds us of our own conversions, baptism experiences, and first communions. Wasn’t submission the choice we had to make? Not a popular word these days, so I prefer surrender, like the hymn, “I Surrender All.” There is a parallel for our own surrender in Jesus’ surrender on the cross, which is what our Lord’s supper memorializes.

For us to practice Vital Hospitality, there is a certain surrender as well. Surrendering to God’s plan means we must offer hospitality to all, and not just the people we like or relate to. This is especially true and sometimes difficult as we encounter panhandlers or people begging for

money at every corner. Yet a transformation of the heart and a willingness to submit to God's commandments can happen. May I recommend a secular 1947 movie to you, called "It Happened on 5th Avenue." A wise old hobo who stays in abandoned homes invites more homeless folks to move in temporarily. The rich homeowner disguises himself to join the group and becomes transformed by the new hosts and small group of new friends. He re-discovers humility and the love of his estranged wife. Joshua used the covenant and the stone as a reminder and memorial to the people of their own transformed hearts.

John 12 begins the end of Jesus' public ministry. It was six days before Passover. Jesus went back to Bethany where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary lived. A dinner was given in his honor. The pure nard was a fragrant oil and expensive perfume made of the roots and stems of aromatic herbs found in India. You know this story well. Judas objected to the extravagant use (it was worth a year's wages!), but Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet was an offering of her generosity as host. But it was also an act of living hospitality, usually reserved for a slave not a hostess. People's feet were nasty in Biblical times, due to the footwear of sandals, and the lack of sewage systems. Streets were filthy; people reclined for a meal, so like we wash our hands, they washed their feet. Judas didn't care about any of that, just his own greed. Judas often pocketed some of the benevolence money for himself as treasurer, but Mary gave openly and generously. Perhaps he rejected her action because it reflected the guilt of his own sin.

Normal anointing was ceremonial and festive, and it made sense to have their leader anointed during this honoring meal. What they did not

realize until Jesus spoke up was that it was leading to his judgment and death on a cross. That is why this anointing took on more serious overtones. Like our communion, it was both celebratory and an act of remembrance, life, death, and sacrifice, much like lighting a candle for someone who's died or ringing a bell as we will do on Memorial Sunday.

Jesus is saying if Mary wants to be this hospitable to me, let her. She was called to share this pint of perfume because she was a listener and student of Jesus; she may have had insights to understand he was leaving them soon and would return in spirit. We do not know, but she was reflective about her actions. In another gospel, Matthew, the gesture was noted as having been Mary Magdalene the sinner, but in John, the gesture is more about their relationship with Jesus and her gratitude for his sparing her brother's life.

What are you willing to surrender or sacrifice to offer hospitality to someone? With Jesus and Joshua, God shares his hospitality first, then we are called to do the same. Sometimes hospitality is just getting along, signing a covenant or putting up a shrine, or cleaning the house, preparing a meal, doing the laundry, giving funds for others. Sometimes hospitality is life and death, providing medical care, safety, or counseling. People come and go in our lives, but is the Lord always welcomed? Do we always make time for God? For Jesus? For the Holy Spirit to dwell within? Lent can be a confusing time since we fast or cut something out, yet we are also called to share. That's what the submission is I'm speaking of. We submit to God's direction; we yield so that we can give to others. Like Sabbath we rest so that we can work. Living our lives together with all its complexities and our personal differences is the

paradox of being human, and because of it, we are called to share vital, life-giving hospitality with others. May you be transformed as needed to surrender those little gods and distractions. Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your teaching and your reminders. Open our minds and hearts to accept the divine calling to be welcoming to others who may be different. May you strengthen us to share our building with like-minded groups, fueling our mission and purpose to share our faith and gratitude with others. Bless these elements of communion as we remember your sacrifice through its symbolism. Anoint us Lord to do your work in this world. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.