Date: November 8, 2026 (Pentecost 24)

1. Texts: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Ps. 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: commitment and covenant.
4. Aim: challenge, leading to commitment.
5. Proposition: "There are consequences when we choose to serve our God."

THE CHOICE TO SERVE

Joshua tried three times to give the Jews a way out of the impending yet necessary commitment to God.

1. Serve God, but if you don't want to do that, you can serve some other gods.
2. Serve God, but if you cheat on him, it will go very badly for you.
3. Now, are you sure? God will hold you to your promises.

Jesus delivered a similar warning when he said,

> No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.[1]

It's actually very interesting how frequently the issue of choice arises in our relationship with God. Moses laid out the same choices before his death.[2] There's Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. The prophet Samuel tells King Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice.[3] Even Jesus made the choice to sacrifice himself. The issue of choice is central to our relationship with God.

That relationship is primarily one of love. God loves us, and we respond to him with love. But love must always be chosen. It cannot be compelled. Love is always an outcome of our freewill. We choose to love. There is no other way.

In faith, we must also choose to obey. This is a little more complex, because most of us most of the time don't like being told what to do. We have freewill

[1] Matthew 6:24.
[2] Deuteronomy 30:15-20.
[3] 1 Samuel 15:22.

and we very much like to exercise it, even when authority figures try to tell us what to do.

Inside the Christian faith, obedience is an expression of our love for God. Out of his love for us, God expresses his desires and hopes for our lives. Out of our love for him, we respond with obedience to those desires and hopes. Even in obedience, our choice plays the central role.

Today, we are once again being confronted with the same choice Joshua and the Hebrew community faced those millennia ago. Will we choose to follow the Lord or will we choose other gods?

And there are other gods to be had. Yes, there are plenty of non-Trinitarian options to choose from. People can give their allegiance and love to any number of them.

People can choose to mix a number of spiritual practices together, which may take on an appearance of a Christian sect, but without being genuinely Christian as we Trinitarians understand it.

But we can find our ultimate meaning and goals in the search for wealth and success. Our careers and families can take on divine importance. Our ideologies can take on the appearance of theology and thus make politics appear like divine instruction and leaders as empowered representatives of the divine.

There are other gods to be had.

Joshua asked his people if they were willing to make the choice to serve the Lord. In essence, they would have to choose to take on the Two Great Commandments of Jesus:

> 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'[4]

[4] Matthew 22:37-39.

Such choices would involve sacrifices and the informed exercise of their freewill. They would accept the consequences of loving God with all that they are, as well as accept the consequences of their failure to do so.

The Hebrews said, "We are ready and willing so to do."

Joshua asks us the same questions today. I invite you to respond silently to God as you hear, mark, learn and inwardly digest these questions now.

1. Are you willing to choose God and to reject other gods? **[Wait.]**
2. Are you able to serve God despite the errors you will make? **[Wait.]**
3. Are you certain that you want to put God at the centre of your life? **[Wait.]**

All that remains for us is to put our choices into action in our time, space and experience. It'll take some work, but we can do it—just as the Hebrews of Joshua's time did.

AMEN.