



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 9, 2014

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text: [Joshua 24:14-24](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Joshua 24:14-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 111](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Peter 2:9-12](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

The Savior's Sermon: Let Your Light Shine

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

Throughout the season of Epiphany, we've looked at how Jesus reveals himself by his powerful miracles, his paranormal activity. The last couple weeks and during the next couple of weeks, we'll look at how he reveals himself as the promised Messiah through his powerful words in the Sermon on the Mount. The readings all reinforce the truths of what Jesus says in our Gospel.

He said you do what you are. If you're salt of the earth, then be salt. If you are light of the world, then be light. Let it shine. Don't hide it. It's kind of the positive side of what he had said at another place in the Gospels where he said out of the heart comes sexual immorality and all these other sins and saying because you are a sinner, you sin. Now he is reminding us that the people he was talking to were no longer sinners as such because they were forgiven through faith in the Messiah. They believed he was that Messiah. His powerful teachings now put into practice some of the things that he had talked on. It's along the same lines as what Joshua is saying to the Israelites.

The Israelites knew who God was and what God had done for them, so he says to them, "Now that you've seen what the Lord has done, serve him in all faithfulness. Let your light shine. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." That's the same type of thing that Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount.

Joshua was coming to the end of his life. He had been with them all the way from Egypt. He had been one of the spies that went into the promised land and said "we can conquer it," and the people said, "no we can't." So they had to wander for those 40 years in the wilderness before they could go into the promised land. Then Moses couldn't enter the promised land, so Joshua led them into the promised land. Now they had conquered it to a point.

The people had seen all kinds of paranormal activities, hadn't they? The Jordan split and they walked through it on dry ground to enter into the promised land when they first came in. That's beyond the explanation of science. The walls of Jericho had come falling down without them lifting a sword, just lifting their voices. God had kept his promise. God had given them homes to live in that they had not built. God had given them groves and vineyards to harvest from that they had not planted. They had

conquered the Amorites and the Canaanites to the point that they could take possession of a lot of it. But they didn't drive them completely out as God had said to do.

Now Joshua is about to die, so he has them renew the covenant. He had just finished telling them everything God had done for them. He was retracing all the history that these people would probably know. Then after retracing it, he says, "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt and serve the Lord." After you heard everything God has done for you, who is going to say no, I don't want to do that? After you think back on how God had done all these incredible miracles and had given them victories over people they had no reason to think they could defeat, who is going to say no, I don't want to serve the Lord? But Joshua still challenges them.

Just like when Jesus said if salt loses its saltiness, what good is it, there is a warning there also in letting your light shine or be the salt of the earth when he says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He also warns them and says to them, "But if you think it's undesirable," literally "if you think it's evil to serve the Lord, then choose who you are going to serve... the gods that your forefathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates or the gods that they worshiped in Egypt, but you can't say you're serving God and serve these other gods. If you are going to serve the Lord, if you are going to choose to serve him, then you better throw away these other things." This isn't a choice to believe in God. This is a choice to live for God after they had seen everything God had done for them. God had made them his people. Now he's saying to choose to live as God's people. Choose to be what God has made you to be.

Of course the people said "we'll serve the Lord. Far be it from us to forsake the Lord and serve other gods." Who is going to say, no, I don't want the God who knocks down walls to be on my side? I want to go it alone. No fool is going to say that. They profess that they are going to serve the Lord. They are going to be what God has called them to be.

Joshua then speaks probably the most surprising words in the entire Book of Joshua. He comes and rains on their parade. He says, "You're not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sin if you forsake him and serve foreign gods. He will bring disaster on you and make an end of you." The people interrupt and say, "No, we'd never do that." At that point in time, I have to believe they meant it that they would serve the Lord, but Joshua's warning was spot on for the Israelites, wasn't it?

If you've been reading the *Today's Light Bible* readings as we've been going through the Bible, you just finished the Book of Judges. You saw what happened to these people that said we will serve the Lord. You saw the wicked things they had done and how they turned their back on the Lord. All of a sudden they got real enthused about lawn ornaments. They put up Asherah poles in their yards to worship these false gods. They worshiped Baal. They did things that were just horrific in God's eyes.

You remember why God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, right? If you read in the Book of Judges, the people of one of the Israelite towns did that same thing to the wife of a Levite. The Levite was so torn up by this that he cut his dead wife into 12 pieces and sent her to the 12 Tribes of Israel and said, "How can you allow such a wicked thing to be done among God's people?" Some of the things you read in the Book of Judges is just horrific. Joshua hit the nail on the head when he said, "You're going to rebel and then God's going to have had enough of you."

Later on down the line when it's split into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Ten Tribes, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah...Elijah served as a prophet in the Northern Kingdom. I don't know if you remember Elijah. He would have been great on the *Food Channel* nowadays. He had that great bowl cook-off against the prophet to Baal where the Lord consumed it by fire. After that he thought everyone would listen, and no one listened. The people still wanted to worship Baal even after God had kicked Baal every six ways to Sunday.

Elijah then ran off and said, "I've had it Lord. Just take me out of this world. No one listens to me. I'm no better than the prophets who went before me." Then God gives him the good news that there were still 7,000 people that hadn't bowed down to Baal, hadn't kissed Baal. It was good news for Elijah because he thought there wasn't anybody, so there's at least 7,000. But when you remember when they left Egypt there was over 2,000,000 of them and now there's only 7,000 that still love the Lord and aren't worshipping a false god, that's pretty sad, isn't it? Evidently "let your light shine" and "as for me and my household, we'll serve the Lord" just became something to hang on a wall and not something to do.

We might say to ourselves, we don't have any gods to throw out and we serve the Lord. After all, when we're confronted with this truth that God didn't just give us houses to live in that we didn't build and groves and vineyards to harvest from that we didn't plant, he's given us much more. He's defeated a greater enemy than the Amorites. He's defeated Satan. He took away the guilt of our sins. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer slaves to Satan. We've been set free. We've been forgiven. God has looked us in the eyes and said, "You are my child. I've called you by name. You are forgiven and heaven is yours." Then if God comes to us and says "Choose this day whom you will serve" or "let your light shine" or "be salt," we'll say, "you bet! I'm going to be salt. I'm going to be light. I'm going to serve the Lord. I've got no other god that I need to throw out, like those foolish Israelites."

Not so fast. We need to take to heart God's warning in the Sermon on the Mount that salt can lose its saltiness. We need to take to heart Joshua's warning to the Israelites because we do have gods that we are tempted to worship instead of the Lord. The gods we are tempted to worship are not carved wood covered in gold or graven images of that sort. The gods that I believe at times you and I are tempted to worship are gods of flesh and blood, gods that we see every morning when we look in the mirror or maybe that we see at night as we sit around the dining room table. I'm convinced in many respects that the Baal and the Asherah poles of the 21st Century in the United

States is that we make ourselves a god, what we think is right and wrong, how we think God should act, and our children. How it affects us or our children is what we view as the most important things, even more important than what God wants. It sounds noble because God has told us to care for our family, but he's also told us not to love them more than we love him. If we are more concerned about what we think is good for us than we are about what God has said, then we've got a problem. We are in danger of losing our saltiness. It's not just in our daily lives. I think it happens even in our congregational life.

As we heard through Peter, God has called us to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. That's one of the ways we are to let our light shine, by sharing the Gospel with others. I don't believe I've ever been to a meeting (an open forum, a meeting, or a presentation) where the people have come all upset because we aren't doing enough to share the Gospel with those who don't yet believe. But I have been to a few of the meetings where people come all upset because we're not doing something exactly how they would prefer us to do it, and since we're doing something different than what they think is best, we should stop doing it whether or not it benefits anyone else. In those instances, haven't we just made ourselves a god? We might not be putting a pole up in our front yard, but we are saying, "I know better than what God has said in Scripture."

You and I need to be careful about that because we are all inclined to do it. When you do it, I can see it and say you're being foolish. But when I do it, I can come up with all kinds of reasons why you have to understand why this is okay for me. I'm sure you're the same way.

Instead of making excuses, instead of saying, "Yeah, but you should be talking to this person or that person, not to me," what you and I need to do, what is imperative for us to do is to take these sins and acknowledge them and then take them to the cross of Christ. There they are forgiven. Christ loved God perfectly in our place because you and I love other things more than God at times. Christ died to take away the guilt that the sin of us loving ourselves or others or whatever it might be more than we love God, he took it all away. So we don't make excuses. We don't need to. We don't need to rationalize. As Christians, who are salt and light, we need to let that light shine by just saying, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner," and then rejoicing in that forgiveness. This is our God. He wants us to be close to him. He wants us to know him. He wants us to be salt and light and let that shine to others so that others know about him as well. We'll do it when we stop making excuses and just start getting close to him and then living for him.

It's not a burden to live for God. It's a joy to live for God. It's not a burden to do what God tells you to do. If God says it's going to bless you and you think it isn't, you're wrong. God isn't wrong. I think the more we live for God and according to his will, the more we find that he blesses us in ways we would never imagine. God is just a wee bit brighter than you and me. That's just the way it is.

God has given us the privilege to serve him. He's given us the privilege to know him. He's given us the privilege to be his voice that shares his message with others. Why would we not want others to know the peace that comes from the forgiveness of sins? Why would we want someone to continue living with guilt or with the burden of not knowing what happens when they die? Why would we not want to let that light shine?

I can't think of a good reason. Can you? Amen.