

Dear Friends in Christ,

In our church every May young people stand up at the altar of God and they make a vow. I provide the words which are in the Rite of Lutheran Confirmation. (slide) This is from the last paragraph of their vows.

The pastor reads: *Finally, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the guidance given in God's Word, to be diligent in the use of the Word and the Sacraments, to walk according to the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?*

The confirmands respond: I DO SO INTEND, BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

This is very serious. The promise is being made to God. At the heart of the promise is to trust the Lord and to serve him. This is very good because God wants them to make this commitment.

We know this is good because we hear the Lord through Joshua calling on the people of Israel to renew their vow. In these words from Joshua 24 **The Lord Calls on Us to Renew Our Vow to Him.**

As we meditate on this word of God we are reminded why this is a good thing.

1. The Call to Renew the Vow

Joshua is at the end of his life, 110 years old. He won't be around anymore. Before he goes he wants the people to renew their vow or promise to follow the Lord faithfully.

A. Joshua states the vow, **“fear the Lord and serve him.”**

1. “Fear” is not to be afraid, but to respect him and trust him as their one and only God who is the “Heavenly Father.” They are to serve him that is to put his will and commands before anyone else's.

Sounds easy? Not!

2. Our nature is to do what is easiest and best for me. *“Its Super Bowl Sunday! Why go to church? My friends are having a day long party.”* Also in our world other gods are promoted as being important and powerful: Allah, Mother Earth, the Great Spirit or spirits. *“Shouldn't I show respect to all and bow down to all, just in case?”* my mind asks.

B. The Israelites were confronted with a choice and so are you and I.

1. The Lord had brought Joshua and the Israelites into a relationship with himself. He had revealed himself to Abraham and then Moses. He had given his word. The only choice they had was to walk away from the Lord.
2. If they left the Lord they could trust the gods of the lands of their ancestors who lived beyond the Euphrates. Members of Abraham's family had worshipped these idols. Or they could serve the gods of the Canaanites whose land they had taken over. However, neither the gods of their ancestors, nor the gods of the Canaanites had rescued them and brought them safely to the promised land which they now owned. Only one God had done all that.
3. Joshua knows who he and his household will fear and serve. He confesses, **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** But what was the response of the people?

2. The Reason for the Vow

The people respond and they show us the reason they want to renew their vow.

A. They would serve the Lord. They basically say, *"We would be crazy to follow other gods."*

1. They confess, **"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. And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land."** (17-18) They count off the blessings including freedom, protection and the gift of the land. The Lord had done so much.

They also see a greater blessing.

B. What matters is that they have the Lord as their God. They say, **"We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."** They have a special relationship with him.

1. The Lord had said to Moses and the people, **"You will be my people and I will be your God."** (Exodus 6:7) He was more than a high and mighty Being and they were only his subjects. He was their Father and they were his children. He had even promised that they could live with him someday at Abraham's side in Heaven.
2. This God had even promised that he would come and live with the people. Other religions had stories of gods visiting, but most of time they caused

trouble. God was going to visit his people with salvation. He was going to win forgiveness of sins for them.

For all these reasons they were right to say, **“He is our God.”**

3. The Power needed to Renew the Vow

Their confession is followed by a shocking rejection. Verse 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.”** I believe that Joshua wants them to consider how they are going to keep their vow.

A. Every believer needs to understand, that he or she can only be faithful by the Lord’s grace and power.

1. Joshua accusation was correct. After Joshua’s generation, the people turned away from the Lord and began serving the gods of Canaan. The reason is they stopped listening to the Word of the Lord.

The truth is that without God’s grace we would not be faithful either. We would stop listening to God’s word and we would turn to other gods or at least other things which would become our gods. We also need to have our children and young people in the word, so they don’t turn away.

If we turn away from the Lord, how will there be forgiveness for us? We can’t manufacture it on our own. So, as Joshua says, it will end in disaster. (20) We will lose blessings from the Lord in this life and we will miss out on eternal life.

2. The name “Joshua” means “the Lord saves.” The reason the people of Israel were settling in the promised land was to wait for the Savior who would come. Jesus told the people, “he said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** (John 8:12) He was light when he fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. He kept God’s law with perfect faithfulness. Then, as the prophets foretold, he sacrificed himself for the unfaithfulness of the people, that is all people.

God helps us to keep our vows. When we have that moment where we break our vows, which we do, we go running to God for mercy and we have mercy and full forgiveness in Jesus.

B. Forgiveness in the Lord works faithfulness.

1. I believe the people of Joshua’s day were keenly aware of God’s mercy. He had sustained them in the wilderness. He had given them the land. He

had forgiven their rebellious ways. Knowing God's mercy helped them to be a very faithful generation.

2. Many of our churches have confirmands who are in their 80's & 90's, who have served the Lord faithfully. If you asked them, what their secret is, they would tell you at least two things. One, I, by God's grace, go to church and Communion regularly. Two God is merciful and patient with me. So our confirmands who are in their teens and twenties and the rest of us can say with the Israelites, **"We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."**

Conclusion: We are going to conclude by renewing our vows to the Lord. In the Rite of Confirmation the first sections are a confession of faith in the Triune God. The last two sections and their responses are vows. We will use these today. They are on the screen. (slide)

Pastor: *Do you also, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?*

Congregation responds: I DO SO INTEND, WITH THE HELP OF GOD.

Pastor: *Finally, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the guidance given in God's Word, to be diligent in the use of the Word and the Sacraments, to walk according to the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?*

Congregation responds: I DO SO INTEND, BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

Pastor: Go with assurance that the merciful Lord will help you to be faithful just as he did for Joshua and his people. Amen.