

I. Intro.

A. Some of you may have noticed in recent weeks that our sermons in this Year of the Bible series at Waterford are a little different: More like teaching & less like traditional preaching ...

1. Not surprisingly, I think some of you like this change & some of you are less happy with it ... It kind of corresponds to the fact that some of us operate more out of our heads, while others operate more out of our hearts
2. To the former, I urge you to dig deeper and get the most out of it
3. To the latter, I urge you to goodnaturedly bear with us, and perhaps engage your heart in places other than the sermon, knowing this style change won't be permanent

B. Technically our worship today is not following the salvation history series

1. That series paused last week with the aging Joshua having led the Israelites out of the desert and into the land of Canaan
2. Today, on World Communion Sunday and with a New Testament text from Philippians, it feels very different. From time to time, we will have these Sundays that are sort of a time-out from the Heilsgeschichte

C. So we're not continuing with telling the salvation history today ... and yet on the contrary I maintain that on World Communion Sunday we're doing exactly that!

1. The Heilsgeschichte is not "just ancient history" ... it's current living history!
2. It is always being added to, as God is always reaching out & calling for new & renewed commitments to join God's chosen, shalom, covenant people
3. And by God's grace, I hope that God's ancient salvation story from long ago comes full circle this morning to once again be God's up-to-date salvation story that includes you and me.

II. (Covenant renewal)

A. Lyle reminded us last week that,

1. after all those 40 years of wilderness wanderings, Joshua led the people in another miraculous water crossing, like Moses had done with them from Egypt.
2. Then after that, Joshua led that "mixed crowd", who were not all pure-blood descendants of Abraham & Sarah, in a covenant renewal

a) To paraphrase, Joshua demanded

"All of you, choose this day whom you will serve, whether it's the Pharaoh god whose ways you have unlearned, or the gods that you served along the way, or YHWH, the one who has led in ways you could never have imagined. Who will you serve?"

B. This call by Joshua for radical commitment, this covenant @ Shechem, was not a new call

1. God's people had already made a covenant with God @ Mt. Sinai
 - a) They had willingly chosen YHWH over other local gods
 - b) They had committed themselves to trusting and obeying the God of Abraham & Sarah and the other patriarchs and matriarchs
2. Yet time & again over 40 years, they reneged on that commitment, they wandered away from YHWH & put their trust in other gods, despite their covenant
3. So Joshua felt that in a new land, it was time for a recommitment to their ancestral God ... & that old covenant? Well, the next generation had to make it their own.

C. And so do we ...

1. *Have you been showing up in church from time to time in your life?* Good for you. I trust that's been a positive influence for you.
2. *Perhaps you've actually grown up going to church every Sunday.* You are to be commended for your discipline and loyalty.
3. *Maybe you've also deliberately committed your life to Jesus Christ, & symbolized that commitment in baptism.* Congratulations on that milestone, since it marks the most important commitment of your whole life.
4. But please hear me on this: attending church, or being baptized, or even preaching sermons will not in itself set you right with God.

III. The Apostle Paul knew this same truth.

A. In our text from Philipians, we see how he could have felt entitled to special status with God

1. He had every right to hang his hat on his righteous reputation as a strict observant Jewish leader, one who fulfilled the letter of the law
2. In the Jewish world of Paul's day, if they had held a having-it-all-together contest for being a model Jew, Paul would have won the contest hands down.

B. But amazingly he was willing to let all that go

1. He let go of his rights & entitlements ... all for the greater good of knowing Jesus Christ & the power of HIS resurrection.

2. Paul chose to become like Jesus in humility, dying to his own pride and ambition ... all for the sake of joining in Jesus' triumph over sin & death!

3. In other words, Paul could not rest on the laurels of his faith ancestors

a) He realized he could not just stand before God on their spiritual shoulders

b) His own righteousness wouldn't cut it, because he had to truly own the faith that was handed to him from his parents

c) The Jewish covenant his parents had agreed to was not going to simply grandfather him in

d) He realized he had to make his own covenant commitment ... only to discover that he was living in the generation when the covenant changed forever:

the generation who composed the first Christian churches,
the generation who were alive when God's ultimate will was revealed through God's messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

4. With Jesus' coming, the meaning of that former covenant was never the same

C. So Paul had to make this life of faith his own, to be lived out in the here & now of his day

1. & what was his inspiration for making that faith his own? None other than Jesus himself ... because Christ had made Paul his own!

a) In love, Jesus gave all of himself to conquer the hold evil had over humankind, including Paul!

b) Jesus wanted us for his own: for full intimate relationship with us

2. Therefore it wasn't good enough for Paul to have a half-hearted relationship or a second-hand relationship with Jesus ... the upward call of God in Christ Jesus was something he had to claim for himself

3. This call demands the same of us, my friends

a) Although Christian faith may go back for generations in our families, salvation is not an inherited thing

b) We all have to make this faith our own ... We have to enter our own covenant with God thru J.C. and we have to keep renewing that covenant.

c) And when we do that, we are indeed bringing the bigger salvation story full circle ... When we do that, we are living the history and not just reading about it

IV. Closing

A. Today I invite you and challenge you to fold your own story into God's greater story of love and deliverance

1. If your story remains separate from this Heilsgeschichte, then all the Sunday materials we're teaching in Year of the Bible are basically just interesting but irrelevant stories from two thousand or three thousand years ago.
2. If God's big salvation story does not also incorporate your story, then in the end ... it will be a dying story, one that belongs in a quaint museum display.

B. Are you making God's story your story? (*repeat*)

1. If you've never committed your own life to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and savior, today could be a fresh start for your story ... I or one of the other pastors would be happy to discuss with you God's call on your life.
2. Or maybe it's time today to renew a covenant you made with God earlier in life.
 - a) The Lord's Supper gives you a tangible way to do that, through the symbols of Christ's body and blood.
 - b) Another way to renew your covenant is to add your voice to those of others doing the same thing.

C. We'll close now by sort of stepping back about 3200 years in time to relive that Shechem covenant renewal



1. In light of Jesus' great deliverance of us from our slavery to sin, I invite you to join, if you are willing, in speaking aloud together this covenant renewal from 24th chapter of Joshua. It continues on another slide.

2. *Let's stand to renew this covenant with God, and stay standing for a song that reiterates Paul's message in Philippians 3*

