

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

24 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders of Israel, its leaders, judges, and officers. They presented themselves before God. 2 Then Joshua said to the entire people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors lived on the other side of the Euphrates. They served other gods. Among them was Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor. ¹⁴ "So now, revere the Lord. Serve him honestly and faithfully. Put aside the gods that your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if it seems wrong in your opinion to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Choose the gods whom your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But my family and I will serve the Lord." ¹⁶ Then the people answered, "God forbid that we ever leave the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷ The Lord is our God. He is the one who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. He has done these mighty signs in our sight. He has protected us the whole way we've gone and in all the nations through which we've passed. ¹⁸ The Lord has driven out all the nations before us, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

Ephesians 6:10-20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

John 6:56-69

⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. It isn't like the bread your ancestors ate, and then they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. ⁶⁰ Many of his disciples who heard this said, "This message is harsh. Who can hear it?" ⁶¹ Jesus knew that the disciples were grumbling about this and he said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶² What if you were to see the Human One [\[h\]](#) going up where he was before? ⁶³ The Spirit is the one who gives life and the flesh doesn't help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet some of you don't believe." Jesus knew from the beginning who wouldn't believe and the one who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He said, "For this reason I said to you that none can come to me unless the Father enables them to do so." ⁶⁶ At this, many of his disciples turned away and no longer accompanied him. ⁶⁷ Jesus asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe and know that you are God's holy one."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today we continue with our series, "Postures in the Life of Faith," and our focus in this second week is guidance. There are two key aspects to guidance as a posture of faith: seeking it and using it. If we want to see change in our lives, we can't stop after only asking for guidance. We must take that guidance into account and act accordingly if we want to change the outlook on our lives. And that's why we seek guidance, isn't it? There's an unknown factor before us, or a decision to be made, that has the potential to change our futures, to alter the landscape of our lives. And so we seek guidance, that push into the future from someone with experience, knowledge, or conviction that we may not have. We seek a compass to point us in the right direction.

Sometimes, though, we're too headstrong to know that we need guidance in the first place. Let me tell you what that looks like. As a sophomore in college, I took a hiking trip with a bunch of friends along the Gila River in southern New Mexico. During this trip, we took a side hike to a mountain about a mile and a half away.

Now, what you have to understand is that the Gila River is 1,000 feet below the desert surface. The canyon cuts a deep scar into the face of the arid landscape. To get to this mountain we had to hike 1,000 feet out of the canyon, then hike a mile and a half, then climb the mountain itself, then do that all again in reverse. On our way back from this trip, though, we encountered some large feline scat. Those are just science words for big cat poo. Fear of encountering a mountain lion pushed us off our known path, and of course, almost immediately we lost the trail. So we wandered, for hours, running out of water and finding our

own GPS was broken, leaving us thirsty and lost on the barren floor of the New Mexico Desert. We eventually came to the canyon's edge but were still unable to find the path. So we began a few test descents, trying to find another route down the canyon and to the refreshing water of the river. The best path we could find at this point was an unstable collection of boulders that required multiple fifteen foot jumps down to a point where we could make our way to the valley floor. Obviously, this was not a good option. But, dehydrated and irritated, I argued that we take this path, if you can even call it that, suggesting we jump down and just hope these precariously placed rocks stayed steady as seven delusional college students tried to find base camp.

At this moment, I needed guidance. Dear goodness I needed guidance! But I was out of my mind, parched inside and sunburned outside, scared that this puma was going to

make me a meal, and so I started advocating for some STUPID decisions. Rather than seek the guidance of our more experienced leaders, I began to climb down to the first ledge. Fortunately for me and the rest of our group, one of trip leaders who was bringing up the rear of our party caught up to us. She stopped me from going further down that treacherous way, shut me up, and offered us a bit of guidance. She triangulated our position between the mountain, the canyon's edge, and where the trailhead should be, and pointed us along the canyon's edge in hopes we'd find familiar territory. Of course, we found the real path, found our way to the river and then to camp, and finally drank deeply both water and safety, all because we eventually listened to the right guidance and followed it into a much better future.

From our places of relative safety and security, we can suddenly find ourselves out of our element and in deep

need for someone else to point us in the right direction, away from our irrational decisions and toward a future full of life abundant. In the story of Joshua, we find an entire people group in just such a situation. The Hebrew people were once slaves in Egypt, then wandering nomads on the Arabian Peninsula, then warrior clans in the land of Canaan. At this point, though, the people of Israel were forming a nation for the first time. They'd never faced such an opportunity before, before, an experience which brings a level of excitement and an equal portion of fright. Their history leaves them thrilled for this opportunity and woefully unprepared for what comes next. They're staring at the edge of a canyon, so to speak, and wondering how to get down to the refreshing waters below. What guidance does Joshua, their military leader, offer them as they set off in this state of nation making? He says, quite simply, "My family and I will serve the Lord."

About fifteen hundred years later, the church in Ephesus faced equally unfamiliar territory. Roman citizens who once worshipped many idols, combined with ethnic Jews who worshipped YHWH, slaves and land owners, women and men, all sit now together as part of the same community that professes Jesus, once dead, as the Risen God. There's a potential for division and strife built in to this community's DNA, and with this new landscape of the world, the community's future seems at risk. They too stand at the cliff of the future, unsure how to proceed. What guidance does Paul offer to the community? Paul encourages everyone to "Put on the full armor of God," the armor of truth and righteousness, of peace and faith, of salvation and the Holy Spirit, of scripture and prayer. With a bit more detail, Paul follows in ~~Jeremiah's~~ Joshua's footsteps and calls the Ephesians to live a godly life.

In John, we see that the Bread of Life teaching that Jesus offered, where he talks about his flesh being true food that leads to eternal life, didn't go over so well with the crowds that followed Jesus. Many disciples not only abandon his teaching but leave his side altogether. This leaves Jesus at a precipice of his ministry, staring over the edge at the future in store for Him, and looking for a push in the right direction from those who are left. How incredible is that?! Even Jesus seeks guidance, asking those remaining disciples whether they will depart, even the twelve he chose. Instead, Peter answers on behalf those who remain. "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are God's holy one."

As I stood over the precipice of the Gila river canyon, I needed guidance, just as the Israelites, the early church, and even Jesus needed guidance at various points in their lives of faith. Guidance is the push into the future from

someone with experience, knowledge, or conviction that we may not have. Think about it. When you go on a trip to a new place, you use a map to give you new knowledge. My parents use paper AAA trip ticks, while I use Google maps, but we all go to some resource with knowledge of the place we're going and the roads in between to get us there safely and relatively quickly. Or, when you start dating for the first time, you seek out the advice of friends or family members who have that kind of experience, to help us navigate the excitement and pitfalls associated with that new kind of relationship.

But this third area, seeking guidance from the conviction that we don't have, is perhaps the most interesting. In Scripture, as we read about Jesus, we have these subtle hints of his humanity that help us remember that Jesus, while fully God, was also fully human like you and me. This question to the disciples – “Do you also want to

leave?" – could seem like a test of their faith or like a trick question if we assume that Jesus already knows the answer. But imagine he says it differently, with a bit of concern in his voice. "*Do you also want to leave?*" Are you going to leave me too? That's how I hear it. At this point in his journey, Jesus is ready to turn toward Jerusalem, to literally face the beginning of the end of his life as he knew it. To his friends, whom he knew from the beginning, he brings this question in his complete humanity, not wanting to be abandoned, not wanting to face this future alone. Even Jesus benefits from guidance at this point, because the disciples share this conviction that they've got nowhere else to go. Even if Jesus' teachings are hard, he is the Christ, the holy one of God. With Jesus is eternal life. It is the conviction, the passion, the faithfulness of the disciples that point Jesus toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, toward the resurrection.

Notice that, in each of these situations, guidance is a push into the future, though the push comes from different sources. Sometimes guidance comes from longtime leaders, which we see in Joshua. Joshua's led Israel's since Moses' death decades ago, and now on the edge of this canyon of nation making, this precipice of becoming a single nation instead of a conglomeration of nomadic tribes, Joshua pushes them into a common future with a common commitment, to serve the Lord.

Sometimes guidance comes from experts like Paul, one whose theological and spiritual prowess helped to found not only the Ephesian community, but churches all across the Greco-Roman world. As the culture looked with disdain upon this life of faith and these new Christians from incredibly diverse backgrounds wondered whether there was a future in store, Paul reminded people of their armor, not the weapons of war, but instead the identity of Christ,

the markers of Christ alive in them, to bind them together and face the future together. This armor of love based in God would carry them safely into the future.

Sometimes, though, we need guidance not from our leaders, not from the experts in the world, but from the friends in faith who rally around us, who offer support when others abandon us. Like Jesus, we may come to times where we know what the future has in store for us if we continue to follow God, but we need to know that we're not going to walk that path alone, that following God is worth the inherent risk. The guidance we need in times like this is the conviction and passion of our friends in faith, because from that passion, that trust, we may draw strength. The belief of the disciples helped to guide Jesus toward Jerusalem, to orient his life toward the cross, to redirect him to the purpose of God, and the belief of those around us may also guide us into God's purposes.

Without guidance, we jump recklessly into canyons when there's still a path we might take. But with guidance, we have strength to face those God-given paths that are risky, dangerous, that very well may take our lives. This isn't jumping down blindly onto the unstable boulders of a canyon – who would do that?!?! – but there's still risk involved. Living the rebellious love of God that overturns the powers of oppression in our world is a high risk, high reward calling. We need guidance and strength to walk those paths prepared for us by God.

So who here needs guidance? Guidance for the future? Decisions to be made? Opportunities that may unfold? Everyone? I know I do. I think we all do, right? Raise 'em up! Now, look at those with upraised hands. These are also your guides, the people who will give you guidance, that push into the future because they each have some experience, knowledge, or conviction you don't have. We

can seek guidance from the wisdom of Scripture and the wisdom of our community, for both of these sources carry experience, knowledge, and conviction that may not only benefit our lives, but help to create more wonderful futures for the world God calls us to love and serve. And we must remember, at all junctures, that seeking guidance is not enough. We must also embody that guidance, live out that wisdom we receive. Fortunately for us, the church is a community of guides and followers, seeking to help one another live the abundant life of Jesus. Together, let us seek, offer, and then live the guidance we share as the Body of Christ. Amen.