

**On August 26, 2018, Pastor Joel shared the following message, entitled "*In \_\_\_\_\_ We Trust*". It is based on the passages from Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Ephesians 6:10-20; and John 6:56-69.**

This past week, for some reason, my attention was caught by the phrase on a coin. "In God We Trust." And it just got me thinking. What is that about? Is it really God in whom we trust, in whom we put our hopes and dreams? Do we really put our trust in God?

In 1814, Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star Spangled Banner" and in the last stanza included these words, "*And this be our motto: In God is our trust. And the Star Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave, O're the land of the free and the home of the brave.*" By the trying times of the Civil War, religious sentiment was running high, and Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, was receiving many requests from religious people across the country, to put some symbol of the deity on our nation's money. He advised James Pollock, Director of the Mint in Philadelphia, to prepare a motto to be placed on coinage, and in 1864, the first U.S. coins were engraved with "*In God We Trust.*" By 1909, it was included on nearly all our coins. During the cold war, and our fight against "godless" communism, President Dwight Eisenhower signed public Law 140 in 1955, that required all coinage and paper currency to display those words that had by then become the motto of our nation: "*In God We Trust.*"

It seems when I watch the news, especially in the last year or so, and hear of all that is going on in our country and in our world, there is scant evidence that it is God in whom we trust. Certainly, we all have something or some things that we place our trust in. And in essence, whatever that is, it does become our God. So what are some of those gods, in whom we put our trust?

Certainly, for many, it is all about

money. People place their trust in money, in having wealth. Of course, you need money to live. Right? No one can deny that money is a requirement for life. You need money to buy food, to eat, to survive. You need money to have a place to live. You need money to buy your clothing, your car, your toilet paper, your everything! You need to have money! It is easy to see how money and the accumulation of wealth, is the thing we should put our trust in. We need it for just about everything. But money has no moral guiding principle, and even people who have lots of money, don't always do well. In fact, those who seem to rely on their money as the central aspect of their lives, miss out on other, very important things. Caught up in the care of their wealth, they neglect the relationships with loved ones, they miss out on the beauty and magnificence of the natural world around them. Money may not actually be the best god there is.

We hear a lot these days about law and order. We have a Law and Order President. Maybe the Law is what we should put our trust in. Growing up in a family with a police officer as the head of the household, I learned from my father, that the laws are meant to protect us. Law is good. And certainly, society runs much better when there are clearly defined laws and rules for everyone to follow. And in a free society, such as ours, it is best when everyone obeys the laws. But is that always true? In college, I was part of a class that traveled from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to Mississippi. Our group of 30 or so mostly white, Caucasian students from the north, got to stay in the homes of black, southern folks from a small town called Mound Bayou, for about 10 days. We saw poverty, worked on some homes that needed repair,

but mostly, just got to know the families we lived with for that short period of time. We learned how the law was not always kind to those people. The law there was not what my father taught me the law was supposed to be. It wasn't meant to protect them. It wasn't their friend. And when our bus took us back toward Wisconsin at the end of our visit, we saw a Mississippi court house with the words inscribed upon it, "Obedience to the Law is Justice" and we knew, that was not true in Mississippi. That when laws are made to benefit some while oppressing others, then there is no justice in those laws. And we learned the truth in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*" In Law we trust? No, there must be something better, broader, more encompassing than laws that are created by limited humanity.

I've been struck by how much violence there seems to be in our nation these days. And with each mass shooting we hear about, come the calls for gun control. But there is a louder, stronger voice that seems to say, "In Guns we trust." Guns have become a sacred commodity. My right to own a firearm seems to outweigh your right to a safe environment to live. And I don't have problems with people owning guns and using them for sport in a responsible manner. But beyond the gun control issue, it just seems that more and more people are turning to guns and killing, as the answer to their problems. Why do so many people need to have a gun with them? They have one in the house. They keep one in their car. They carry one on them when they go shopping. The impression we get, even of many of our police officers, is that the gun is the fallback in any difficult situation. As a police officer on the force in my hometown of 35,000 people for over 25 years, my father fired his revolver at a criminal once. He taught us, you never, never, point a gun at a person. NEVER!!! He found in his work, that talking to people

in difficult situations usually led to a much better outcome than using a gun. In guns we trust? I don't think I want that as my god.

We could go on for a long, long time, talking about all the different things we place our trust in. But essentially, what we are talking about, is finding that thing, that represents the ideals, the hopes, the certainty, the bedrock, of what we believe is good, and right, and true.

Joshua was led to present that very question before the people Israel. After 40 years in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt and slavery, they were upon the threshold to the Promised Land, and he, as their new Moses, was about to lead them forward. Forward into a new land, a new life, a new way of being who they were. And he said to them, "*Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*" Joshua was calling them to choose. To make a decision, who their god would be. In whom would they put their trust?

Jesus, in John's gospel, puts the same question before his disciples. In John, we have a Jesus who puts it right out there, is not afraid to say things that might offend, who requires much of his followers. And here, his talk about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, has really turned some away from him. And so he puts it before those closest to him, the Twelve, saying, "*Do you also wish to go away?*" Simon Peter answers him with words that all faithful disciples are to claim, "*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of*

*eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."* Jesus calls them to choose. They can no longer sit on the fence. They must make a choice. Do they believe and trust in him or not?

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians, gives us this wonderful image of the "*armor of God.*" For some of us, this may conjure up memories of Sunday School and making cardboard shields and helmets and fun little swords and armor to wear. But that is not the image the author intended. I think he is very serious about what he is saying. He wants us to picture ourselves as soldiers, warriors, as those who are preparing for battle. Think of our Army troops in Afghanistan or some far away nation, where the threat to life is a daily concern. He also is putting a choice before his readers. There is a calling to take seriously the spiritual struggle that they must engage in. It is a struggle against the "*cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*"

We have the same choice, whether or not we will engage in the fight for justice, to counter the powers of evil in our world, to be on the side of light and love, or of shadow, deceit and violence.

We can go through life, never truly committing to anything of any truth or substance. Some people do that. But the gospel of Christ demands that we make a choice. To choose in whom we will trust our lives to, our families, our hearts, our energies, our everything to.

May we each, and all together, choose that power, that presence, known in the person of Jesus Christ, that way of love, that call for justice, that grace of inclusive acceptance, that desire to triumph over wrong, that peace which passes all understanding. So that we might know with a certainty that it is God in whom we trust, so that with Joshua, we can all say together, "*. . . as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*" Amen.