



6 March 2018

## A SACRED PLACE

**Joshua 24:14** "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. 15 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." 16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; 18 and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." 19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" 22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem. 26 Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the LORD. 27 Joshua said to all the people, "See, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God." 28 So Joshua sent the people away to their inheritances."

Joshua calls the nation together and they affirm three times "we will serve the Lord". They then ratify this with a covenant at [Shechem](#) – a city that is deeply significant in the life of Israel. Israel took it from its original Canaanite residents and made it a site of deep religious significance: Abraham reached the "great tree of [Moreh](#)" at Shechem and "built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him" - and a covenant between God and the descendents of Israel is established. Here Jacob built an altar which he named *Ei-Elohe-Israel*.<sup>2</sup> Joshua crossed the Jordan River and conquered the towns of Jericho and Ai. He then led the Children of Israel to Shechem where he built an altar to God on Mount Ebal, and wrote a copy of the law on a pillar of stones.<sup>3</sup> After completing his conquest of Canaan, he again gathered the

<sup>1</sup> Gen 12:6-7

<sup>2</sup> God the God of Israel Gen 33:17-20

<sup>3</sup> Joshua 8:30-35

people at Shechem, reminding them of their previous commitment, and set up another stone saying: *this stone shall be a witness.*

While it is true that God inhabits all of the earth, we human beings need sacred places that remind us of our faith commitments. Just as the children of Israel returned repeatedly to Shechem, so we can find treasured places of our own as places that offer spiritual strength. For some this might be a church building, or a place in a garden of remembrance, or a view from a mountain top. For others this will be a family home, or a retreat centre, or a cattle kraal. Find your sacred place and return to it often so that you may be strong in the Lord.

**For Thought**

|                                       |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Hold to the center</i>             | <i>I'm going to a place</i>        |
| <i>Beyond time and space</i>          | <i>I know it by heart</i>          |
| <i>Gotta find a sacred place</i>      | <i>And there I know that we'll</i> |
| <i>Everybody's got a sacred place</i> | <i>Never be apart</i>              |

*Mason Jennings Lyrics*

**The Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**Crucial Choices**

*The Scripture passage for the day is drawn from Reuben Job and Norman Shawchuck, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and other Servants, (Nashville, The Upper Room 1983), 123.*

*This reflection is from my own devotional exercises for the day. (Rev. Pete Grassow)*