

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18. Pentecost 13B, 8/23/15 Pastor Ellen Schoepf

They think I'm making a mountain out of a molehill. She couldn't see the wood for the trees. He found himself up the creek without a paddle. If I were you, I'd tell him to go jump in the lake. These are all examples of idioms and we probably all use them at some point in time. One idiom in particular kept popping into my head as I read all of today's scripture readings – **where the rubber meets the road**. We all probably understand this common phrase refers to that point in time when the tire on a vehicle touches pavement. Originally developed for a tire company ad campaign, this idiom is often used to highlight moments that are important in a person's life, moments that require skill, tenacity, smart choices and decisions. If I were to say to you, "This is where the rubber meets the road," I am probably trying to communicate, "This is the moment of truth, a pivotal moment that really counts."

Well, in today's Old Testament reading from Joshua, the time has come where the rubber meets the road. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness the Israelites have entered and now occupy the Promised Land. Their lives have begun to take on some sense of normalcy under Joshua's faithful leadership. However, the aging Joshua knows there are dangers with normalcy and contentment. This can cause people to

become indifferent in their commitment to the Lord. Joshua knew such contentment could delude people into believing that it wasn't God who had been providing for them all along. He also knew that as the people settled into the land, they began worshipping various false gods associated with other non-Israelite peoples around them. He knew the Israelites could easily lose their sense of identity and unity as God's Chosen People. So, as Joshua faces the end of his life, he calls the people together in one place to renew the covenant between God and the Israelite tribes and fortify their identity and unity. After reminding the Israelites of God's faithfulness to them, he exhorts them to leave the false, foreign gods and serve Yahweh, the Lord their God. And, this is where the rubber meets the road as Joshua says, "Choose this day whom you will serve." He continues to lay it on the line by saying, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

In response, the people **do** remember the Lord their God. They do remember how God had delivered, protected and provided for them. They respond, promising to serve Yahweh by saying, "Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

We, as 21st century Lutheran Christians, believe, as did the Israelites, that God has taken the initiative to choose us and not the other way

around. However, like Joshua and the Israelite tribes, we too are called upon to respond to God's having chosen us first by choosing to be faithful. And, it is in that call where the rubber meets the road. In our faith and life journey, we too face dangers and temptations. All kinds of false gods – money, power, success, all of the many things to which we are addicted – they all attempt to demand our loyalty. Like the Israelites of old, we too need to remember where we've been, where we are now, and where we are going. For each one of us, the covenant was sealed in baptism. We have been chosen by God and we have been called, loved and forgiven. But, do we take that for granted and do we struggle to divide our loyalties and commitments?

The writer of Ephesians understands the dimension of such struggle and the many ways in which false, worldly gods attempt to seduce our loyalties. The writer of today's second lesson also fully understands the systems of violence, oppression, despair and the elements of evil that are present, active and operative in the world around us. Against such forces we often find ourselves powerless. Knowing no other strength than God's own strength can fortify the body of Christ, we find the rubber meeting the road as the writer of Ephesians calls us to put on the whole armor of God. Now, I have to say that, in a world where violent video games and real

looking toy guns are available for purchase at any local Meijer store, I am challenged by the metaphors used in this scripture reading. In a culture and world where violence seems to raise its ugly head on a daily basis, I am not sure the metaphors expressed in this reading are helpful. Yet, the deeper truth is that the armor of God we are called to wear is truth, righteousness, gospel peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God. These are more powerful than the mighty armies of the world. Within the garrison of God's loving provision for us, we have been commanded, charged and commissioned to stand firm in this world because Christ's love and reconciliation are at work and the reign of God is breaking in among us. The rubber meets the road as we put our trust in a God who will prevail. This is our task and this is our identity.

And, yes, this identity is called forth as we hear Jesus speak to us in today's reading from John's gospel. Jesus has been teaching his followers things that are very difficult to grasp with all these words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. His teaching was startling, grotesque, unsettling, scandalous and hard to believe. Many could no longer see what it was about this Jesus that attracted them in the first place, and so they left. Even the twelve disciples were often plagued by doubt, fear and a lack of courage as they heard Jesus' difficult teaching. And, I have to say we

are not very different. When we are faced with life's challenges and hardships, we are often tempted to conclude that the promises we trusted were empty and our faith has been misplaced.

Well, the rubber finally meets the road as Jesus asks the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Peter then replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Peter realizes that despite the startling images Jesus has been sharing, Jesus **is** the Holy One of God who **alone** possesses the words of eternal life. And, it is this decision not to turn away but to walk forward with Christ that draws the disciples together as a community of faith.

Friends, it is the same for us. Yes, the rubber meets the road as we hear Jesus ask us, "Do you also wish to go away?" It is not a creed, a mission statement, a style of worship, a time of worship, a service project, or anything else that unites us as the body of Christ. It is all about God's gift of grace that invites us to follow Christ alongside others as we are continually being made into the people of God. So, like Peter, we respond, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life." How can we do anything else?