

Why Are We Here?

Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78: 1-7

It was the end of the road for Joshua. He had been the general of the army of Israel and the one who, as Moses' successor, had inspired and led their movement into the Promised Land. The name *Joshua*, which in its Greek form is *Jesus*, was also chosen for the one we call the Christ who would lead all people into a new Promised Land.

This scripture passage represents a portion of Joshua's farewell address to Israel. He says, in effect, "Yahweh God has a Word for you, Israel. 'I've been your God for a long time; the God of your people since way back before Abraham, when they started out worshipping other gods and then began to worship me'".

Then Joshua concludes, "Remember, I'm telling you, be sure to worship God even when I'm gone. Reject the other gods your ancestors worshiped. You might be tempted to turn to them again. Listen to me. My family, my descendents, we will always worship Yahweh the Lord.

The people cried out, "Oh, no, Joshua! We promise. We'll always worship the Lord, too!"

Joshua answered, "Who are you kidding? You can't worship the Lord. It's too hard for you. You'll never be faithful only to God in prosperity and in adversity, in sickness and in health. You just don't have that kind of commitment."

But the people shouted again: "No! No! We worship GOD! We worship GOD!"

"Okay, you are witnesses against yourselves," said Joshua. "By the commitment you have made, your own lives will be measured."

"We are witnesses!" And so, the Israelites answered Joshua's true question: God's question through Joshua. Perhaps it was really Israel's question of itself as its long-time leader prepares to leave. "Why are we here?"

The people said, "We are here to serve the Lord and to proclaim to all that we are God's people. We worship God!"

Later, in the Hebrew Bible, the Psalmist answers the same question, "Why are we here?" We are here to "tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and God's might, and the wonders that God has done." "We're passing it along to the next generation." That's why we're here.

Each of us wants to know why. *Five People You Meet in Heaven* is book by Mitch Albom. It is a powerful story with the premise that, when you die, you meet five people who have influenced the course of your life, even if you never met them. The purpose of that meeting is to help you understand the meaning of your life -- why you were here. It is to lead you to make peace and to make connections, to forgive and be forgiven. It is to gain a clearer picture of the impact of your choices.

Finally, after you know everything and understand the full extent of what you have meant, you then know you are loved. You then know where home truly is for you. You embrace the full meaning of the biblical idea of *shalom*.

So, why are you here? What is the meaning of your life? Does anybody know? Do you have a clue? Does it have to do with children, friends, career?

Why are you here in this church? What are the reasons for being part of this congregation? What about your reasons for being here today? Why did you show up this morning? Even when we know reasons why we choose to come, to join, and to participate, it's still hard to know the full significance of why we're here. A lot of that is still to be determined.

I went back East to visit my father this week. His health has not been good. We had good visit that meant a lot to both of us. I also spent some significant time with my sister. We went together to our mother's grave. It was a good time of sharing. It was healing time for me and seemed to be for her as well.

On the first leg of my flight back to Kansas, I rode next to a young man. We got to talking and shared about our careers. When I mentioned I was a pastor, the conversation turned to religion. I told him about my work with you. He said that he always felt that was the sort of work he should be doing. We talked for an hour. I suggested a couple of things, including the book *Invitations* which is a great resource to discerning calling and giftedness. I then made a few suggestions about direction and promised to e-mail him. It was unlike me to get into such a conversation on a plane. I may never know the significance of that time. Then again, maybe I will someday.

So, why are we here? Why is this congregation here? Let me suggest some reasons. We are here to worship God and to help others. We are here to help each of us get a clearer idea about why we're each here, and to do so in this life, while we're actually here.

Crossroads Church is a place to practice loving other people and practice living in community. It's a place to practice being loved by others. It's a vehicle to influence society for peace and justice. It's a means to touch a community: Waldo, or Westport, or Wayne Avenue. It's a means to touch people with the love of Christ and to and share our journey. It's a way to be touched by people, touched by their needs and also by their ability to convey the love of Christ and share their journey. Being church is a way to share life with them and with others who are drawn to us from around this city.

We are here as church, as a congregation, to become better people. We are here to serve and worship God. We are here to tell the story to the next generation of how God's Spirit has led us through the wilderness of wandering leads us still on the journey. Thanks be to God!