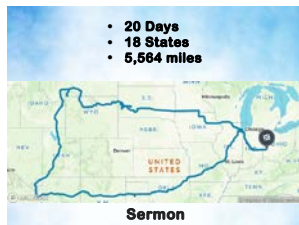


Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one we have chosen to follow, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

My leadership training and my life experience tell me that when more than one person is in charge, nobody's in charge... That was drilled into my head back in my Aid Force days. As the Officer in Charge, I had decisions to make and when I did, those who worked with and for me had to understand who was in charge. Life is like that too... My lovely wife and I, along with my niece, Shelly and her husband, whose name is also Melvin just completed a whirl-wind trip across most of America and back again.



(SLIDE) We started out in downtown Chicago and travelled through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Once we entered California and saw the price of Gas at \$7.39 per gallon, we turned around and started home. We returned by the northern route along Interstate 80 most of the way. On our way back we got to stop at Yellowstone, Devil's Tower, Mount Rushmore, Wall Drug, the Bad Lands of South Dakota, and finally the crash site of Buddy Holley in Iowa. It was a marathon, but the trip of a lifetime.

As we began our trip all four of us had downloaded different Route 66 apps for our phones. You should know that when Eisenhower got the interstate

highways law passed in the 1950's and as the interstates began to be interconnected many of the small towns that relied on travelers along Route 66 dried up and became ghost towns.



(SLIDE) People simply didn't stop to spend the night in these tiny towns and in their tiny motels. Route 66 is broken up into so many small segments it's easy to get totally off the track... Sometimes you'll be driving along and the route simply dead ends. The points of interest along the route range from huge tourist traps to hidden, nearly forgotten, once bustling businesses. Some of these businesses have become world famous, been voted the best attraction in their categories, or are the largest of their kind in the world.



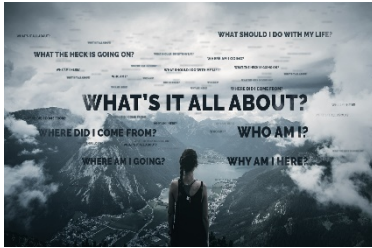
(SLIDE) We saw the largest Catchup Bottle, the largest Covered wagon, the largest rocking chair, and even the world's largest praying hands sculpture... We saw hotels and motels that were converted to Rodeo museums, and so much of our country's memorabilia that is all seems almost like a blur...

Getting back to my story about the four Route 66 Tour Guide Apps...

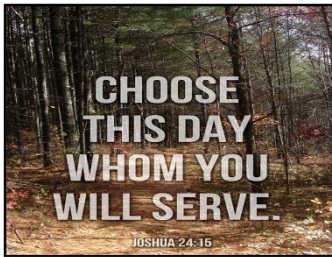


(SLIDE) As we started this epic adventure the 3 passengers all tried to navigate and would give different, often conflicting directions to the driver. It was pure chaos! Our driver for the day, either Melvin or myself, had three voices speaking into his ear and they rarely, if ever matched. Frustration and anxiety soon took over. When more than one of us were giving directions to the driver we would soon come to a standstill where a choice had to be made. Whose directions would we listen to and who would we follow... At one of our earlier stops, while still in Illinois, the proprietor recommended an App that we actually had to pay for... Since that one was highly recommended PJ purchased it and installed it on her phone. After a lot of false starts and missed points of interest we decided to appoint PJ as the master navigator and her directions from the App we paid for would be the ones we followed. For the most part that worked...

The decisions we made about where to stop and what to see were pretty easy decisions. No life-or-death issues... Many of the choices we have to make in our lives aren't so easy. Some can be downright difficult, if not overwhelming, and hard to keep. I'm not talking about deciding on what to wear or what to eat. Those life choices are routine. I'm talking about the big questions of life, like why am I here?



(SLIDE) What vocation or profession is God calling me to dedicate my life's work? For those who are past the working years your question might be what is God calling me to do, now that I'm retired... For those considerably older, you might be faced with the question, why am I still here? ...



(SLIDE) Our Scripture text for today asks the Hebrew people one of those huge questions. It comes from Joshua's last testament. The Bible often recorded the last words of our patriarchs. Prior to today's story, the people of Israel had been living under the yoke of slavery in Egypt. Many of them had been lured into worship of the gods of Egypt. After Moses had died Joshua became the leader of the wandering tribes of the Hebrew people. As we join the story today, these people had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. They were about to walk into the land God promised to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Unfortunately, they found it difficult to abandon all the other voices speaking to them. As he lay dying, Joshua wanted to lay out the choice before the people. He reminded them of all the Lord had done to set them apart as God's Chosen people. How God had given Isaac to Abraham and Jacob and Esau to Isaac. How God had saved them by bringing them to Egypt when the famine hit and then how God brought them up, out of their bondage in Egypt. Along the way they accumulated

many false gods and the practices of the peoples they encountered soon mixed with the worship of the one true, living God. Joshua wanted to renew the Covenant God had made and so he laid out the choice, “Whom will you serve?”

As we read this today, verse 15 has become one of the most read and memorized verses of the Bible. Choose this day whom you will serve. The god’s of the Amorites or the one true God. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord... Given this challenge the people of Israel all proclaim at once they will serve only the Lord God... I’ve heard this called the “Joshua Principle”. The aging leader challenges his people to decide what sort of a community they would be now that they had a homeland, and homesteads, a mortgage, an SUV, an iPod, two dogs and a cat, and more blessings than they could count. He asks them to decide to whom their allegiance would be given. Joshua couched that challenge in a question about commitment: “... Choose this day whom you will serve... As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” That choice has been ringing through generations of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and now to you... Choose this day whom you will serve.



(SLIDE) Over the coming weeks we will be

explaining and offering each of you an opportunity to make a commitment. Today, we’re kicking off something called the

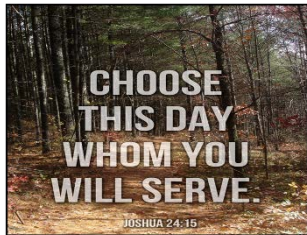
Thrive Campaign. Mark will tell us a little bit about what that is during the

Announcements and over the next 4 weeks you'll receive a lot more info. For now, it's enough to know Thrive is a capital campaign to raise money for the Southern Ohio Synod. It's one way you can join with our Sisters and Brothers in Christ in helping to develop leaders for the Church, to strengthen ministries across the southern Ohio territory, to launch new ministries, and to reach more people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Thrive campaign is one way you can take Joshua up on his challenge. Over the next few weeks we'll provide much more information and on November 13<sup>th</sup> you'll have an opportunity to make a commitment or a statement of intent to help the Southern Ohio Synod reach out to our neighbors and better equip our congregations for the future.



(SLIDE) When all of us were trying to tell the driver which way to go all we got was confused and that confusion paralyzed us, but after we decided to follow only PJ's directions we were able to stay on the path, for the most part, and find almost all of those elusive Points of Interest along the highway. The choices we all make every day reveal where our priorities are placed. I wish I could be as confident as the People of Israel were when Joshua challenged them. Following the Lord isn't an easy road. As we made our way across Rout 66 we sometimes found ourselves on some pretty rough, even some dirt roads. As we followed our leader/navigator, we were able to find most of the interesting attractions and even

some totally delightful side trips. We got to go on a Wildlife Safari, see a rodeo museum, and even visit the Will Rogers Memorial. By the way, Will Rogers was a big proponent of Rout 66. He once said that when the Interstate Highway system was complete, it would be possible for one to travel all the way from the east coast to the west without seeing a thing...



**(SLIDE)** I hope you can take the time to stop and see the delights God has put along your path and I pray you will set your priorities on following the Lord your God in your vocation and in your leisure. May your journey of faith lead you to recommit your life to the Lord. May you choose to follow the one real navigator, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.