Sermon – November 8, 2026

I have a theory that the best sermons, the ones with the most powerful message tend to fall just this side of heresy. It seems that to really proclaim the stunning power of God's grace a preacher needs to say things that shake people to their core. God's saving love is so much more radical than gentle asides, and assurances that God loves you, as if God is little more than a doting grandparent.

At times I admit that I skirt the limits of orthodoxy, though I can defend myself that I have never strayed into heresy while preaching.

However, this morning I am going to say something that, at first blush. could very well be heretical. It could even be interpreted as breaking my ordination vows.

But I believe it needs to be said, and I will say it. But I will also unpack what I mean by it, and you will see my thoughts are not heretical at all.

So, gasp if you will, clutch your pearls if you are wearing them. Just don't call the Bishop until after I have finished my sermon.

Okay, now that the disclaimer has been stated, I'll actually begin the sermon.

This morning we have read something from Scripture that is not true.

Joshua is leading the people of Israel to renew their commitment to the Lord. As the people respond he seemingly chastises them, and throws down a startling statement. He says, "He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins."

That is not true. It. is. not. true.

Reading Scripture is a tricky practice at times. We can come across a passage, and think it means one thing but, when taken in context, sometimes in the context of the entirety of the Bible itself, it means something completely different.

I shudder to think that anybody, anywhere, at any time would read this small passage of the Bible and take Joshua's words at face value, and believe that God will not forgive their sins.

God will. God does. God *has* forgiven our sins.

What we have read today is Joshua, a man of God, a man who practices his faith very seriously, a man who is called by God as a leader, and a prophet, facing the people, and impressing on them just how pivotal their decision to follow God is.

He is warning the people that pledging faithfulness to God is no mere passing agreement. It is an ontological commitment that challenges us to the deepest core of our being.

The trouble with such a commitment is we will fail at keeping it. Joshua knows that, and he says it clearly. But then he throws in that fateful sentence.

He does so as a rhetorical tool, not as a statement of fact. Because it is not a fact. In fact, just the opposite is true.

There are scads, and scads of passages that show that Joshua's statement is not true. All of us very likely could quote at least one of them, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosever believeth in him shall not die but have everlasting life."

That. is. true. Joshua's rhetoric is simply rhetoric, it is not Gospel truth.

If we believe that Jesus is who he says he is; if we believe Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension accomplished what we say it did; if we believe that God came among us, lived and died as one of us, rose again from the dead, and has recreated a kingdom of grace, and love, then there is no sin, no transgression, no thing that will separate from the love of God, which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord..

Yes, it is a dire, and costly decision to follow God. Yes, we will fail. No. No. God will not refuse to forgive our sins.

Rhetoric is one thing. Truth is another. Grace abides, grace prevails. That is the truth, and there is not a bit of heresy in that.