

## Michaelmas 2024 Notes

At Michaelmas, we generally take some time to think about the congregation of St Michael's itself. Who are we? Where are we going? What might God have in store for us?

As we are entering into a union - doing ministry and mission not just in one half of Linlithgow but across a small region - we are thinking this week about our unity as Christians, our common identity in Christ, and how we sometimes need to give up hallowed traditions for the greater mission of God.

Our texts this week both concern the ways in which God makes one people out of many. In our Joshua passage, we witness an act of worship and teaching involving the whole people of Israel. While we would tend to focus on things like *how* they are worshipping, or *how* they are taught or *what* they are being taught, the context here is crucial. Moses and Joshua have just led thousands of people out of Egypt, enduring many hardships as they went. Rather than being simply one people as we tend to think of Jews today, thousands of years ago - just as today - the people of Israel were in fact many *different* peoples. This is what the 'tribes' of Israel were all about. We know from both biblical and other historical records that the tribes of Israel were probably different cultural and ethnic groups that became united through their shared experience of God, and their binding together through shared worship and covenants.

This process begins with the people of Israel, but does not end there. It extends to you and me and all the different peoples of the world. This is the truth that we see in our passage from Revelation. Here, God is not only worshiped by Jews - although he most certainly is - but by people of every race, culture, tribe and language. That is why *we* are told to make disciples of all nations. We are told to do that today because that is what eternity will look like: all the people of the earth worshipping God together.

### Joshua 8:30-35

<sup>30</sup> Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, <sup>31</sup> just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the Israelites, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, 'an altar of unhewn stones, on which no iron tool has been used'; and they offered on it burnt-offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed offerings of well-being. <sup>32</sup> And there, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. <sup>33</sup> All Israel, alien as well as citizen, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark in front of the levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. <sup>34</sup> And afterwards he read all the words of the law, blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the book of the law. <sup>35</sup> There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the aliens who resided among them.

1. Do you prefer worshipping/praying with others or by yourself? What are the pros and cons?

2. This passage records a momentous act of worship involving thousands of people. Have you ever had a feeling God was close when worshipping with others?
3. Joshua does what he does in order to create a common *identity* and *culture* among the different tribes who came out of Egypt and crossed the wilderness. What - if anything - do you think the identity of St Michael's is?

### **Revelation 7:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup>They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

<sup>11</sup>And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, <sup>12</sup>singing,

'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honour  
and power and might  
be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' <sup>14</sup>I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

4. Immigration and multiculturalism are controversial issues at the moment. Based on this passage, what do you think God's attitude to multiculturalism is?
5. Why do you think worship has the power to unite people in this way?
6. Activity. Take a look at the lyrics for the hymn below we sang on Sunday, or - if you have the means - listen to it or sing it as a group. What is the song about? Which phrases or images stand out to you most? Once you've identified something that resonates with you share it with the group.

How shall I sing that majesty  
which angels do admire?  
Let dust in dust and silence lie;  
sing, sing, ye heavenly choir.  
Thousands of thousands stand around  
thy throne, O God most high;  
ten thousand times ten thousand sound  
thy praise; but who am I?

Thy brightness unto them appears,  
whilst I thy footsteps trace;  
a sound of God comes to my ears,  
but they behold thy face.

They sing, because thou art their Sun;  
Lord, send a beam on me;  
for where heaven is but once begun  
there alleluias be.

Enlighten with faith's light my heart,  
in flame it with love's fire;  
then shall I sing and bear a part  
with that celestial choir.  
I shall, I fear, be dark and cold,  
with all my fire and light;  
yet when thou dost accept their gold,  
Lord, treasure up my mite.

How great a being, Lord, is thine,  
which doth all beings keep!  
Thy knowledge is the only line  
to sound so vast a deep.  
Thou art a sea without a shore,  
a sun without a sphere;  
thy time is now and evermore,  
thy place is everywhere.