

SERMON: Choose, This Day and Every Day
TEXT: Joshua 24:14-25

11-8-20

What now? Maybe that's what you're asking yourself in response to the results of this historic presidential election. Despite your choice at the ballot box last week, we all know there is so much difficult work to be done. And it is my hope and prayer that the work we are passionate about is *not* how to undermine the other party or how to rub our wins in their faces. My hope and prayer is that we choose to move forward in a genuine effort to heal our divisions. My hope and prayer is that we all choose to respond with dignity and integrity for the common good of all Americans.

Voting in a democracy is a right, and it is also a choice. The good news for all of us is that a record number of people chose to participate in this election. Some make their choice after careful study and discussion and prayer. For others, the choice is an emotional, reactionary one; when they get caught up in the buzzwords and rhetoric of their crowd. And some are choosing the lesser of two evils.

As I was thinking about choices this week, I was hit hard with the realization that we often seem to agonize over minor decisions while failing to consider

carefully some of the more significant changes in our lives. For example, how many of us women have stood in front of - or even inside of - a closet full of clothes, nearly paralyzed about what to wear. Or we sometimes spend 15-30 minutes surfing the channels on TV, trying to decide what to watch. The problem in both of these examples is too many choices. And the truly sad thing is how easy it is to ignore and forget the number of people in our community and in our country who are forced to make a choice between buying medicine or food, because they can't afford both.

Before we delve into the scripture from Joshua, I must admit that I made a poor choice when I hastily left out the first three verses from Chapter 24. Too late, I discovered that the lectionary includes them because they provide important background information for verses 14-25. So, first, let me share those three important verses with you.

“Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: *Long ago your ancestors — Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor — lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. Then I took your*

father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many.”

This begins Joshua's farewell speech to the Israelites. Having taken over for Moses, Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. Canaan, the land of milk and honey, the culmination of their forty year journey through the wilderness. Joshua reminds them of God's faithfulness throughout the ages. When the people were serving other gods, the Lord took Abraham and led him and made his offspring many.

From here, he urges the Israelites - the children of Abraham - to respond with the same level of commitment and loyalty as God has shown them. He even tells them what their options are. And he tells them what his choice will be.

"Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

The people do not hesitate to answer in agreement, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

But Joshua then challenges them, beginning a litany that we've all experienced before. Joshua: "No, you won't." Israel: "Yes, we will." No, you won't. Yes, we will. In essence, Joshua wants to make sure they understand the significance of their commitment and the consequences if they fail. This is a decision that must not be taken lightly. Finally convinced, Joshua concludes, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel." And the people once again declare their choice, "The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey."

For me, it was not a difficult choice to make. Baptized as an infant, Sunday School and worship every Sunday, Vacation Bible School and a week of church camp in the summer, confirmation as a teenager, youth group, singing in the choir.

Christianity was the lifestyle I was raised with. It was a regular practice, high on our list of priorities. Many of you probably have a very similar experience. So, it's not a hard choice to make. But it can be a hard choice to abide by, day in and day out.

I had a phone call one day from someone asking about baptism. A young woman she knew wanted to be baptized but wasn't a church-goer, and the caller was asking me about the process. After she shared some background information, I sensed that the young woman in question just wanted to be baptized, and that was it. As if the symbolic ritual - whether by sprinkling or immersion - was like a magic pill. Just one dose, and you're covered for all eternity. I emphasized that we - or our parents - take vows when we are baptized. We promise to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We promise to turn away from the path of evil and take the path that follows the way of Christ. We promise to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, obeying his word and showing his love.

Once baptized, you can call yourself a Christian. But you can't leave it at that. It's not just a name or a title. Baptism means that you *choose* to live a Christian life, you *choose* to obey the teachings of Jesus, and you *choose* to show the love of Jesus day after day after day. And it's all or nothing. It's not ours to

decide that we only have to be a Christian one day a week, or we only have to follow some of his teachings, or we only have to share his love with certain people.

Your choice to serve the Lord goes above and beyond your choice at the ballot box. And whether you are disappointed or relieved at the results, God is still on the throne. Let us CHOOSE, THIS DAY AND EVERY DAY, to serve the Lord, to be faithful disciples, to obey Jesus, and to show God's love... to the glory of God!

AMEN.