

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Meditation
Josh 24: 1-2a, 14-18; Eph. 6:10-20; Jn. 6:56-69.

THE CHOICES WE MAKE, MAKE US

“ . . . if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve; . . . but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh. 24:15f, NRSV); “ . . . be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.” (Eph. 6:10, NRSV); “ . . . it is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless.” (Jn. 6:63, NRSV).

Joshua’s call at Shechem for Israel for a renewed fealty to God who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt bear some eerie resemblance to some aspects of the American revolution. It is well known that many Americans fought on the side of the British. They were called Torries. They were loyal to the British crown. They were not disloyal to the American cause for independence from Britain, but felt deeper commitment and emotional identity with the British crown. In fact, after the dust had settled, about half a million loyalist to the British crown who fought on the side of the British, left and went to Canada, there to settle down.

It must be said that it was very timely for Joshua to make that call. Israel’s national character and its unique religious identity had begun to confront cultural and religious norms previously unknown to them. Those forces and factors became inevitable as they sought to settle and claim space that already belonged to cultural and religious norms that were hostile to them. So Joshua’s call at Shechem was not easy for him to make; nor was it an easy one for the people to respond to and embrace. They had to make a choice. And the choice they make will, in turn, make them.

The American experiment in participatory democracy, based on the principle that “all . . . are created equal” had been, and is, an unqualified success story that has captured the imagination and admiration of the whole world. Americans, native born and immigrant/American citizens alike could be rightly proud of how it all came about, sustained, maintained and strengthened. For the way in which it came about was because of the choice made by leaders and the people at the beginning, which has made what they turned out to be, a “new nation conceived in liberty” in the words of Abraham Lincoln. And it is maintained and continue to be strengthened by the choice(s) being made by those of us today who are bearers and makers of that choice. The same is true for any and all other peoples and nations around the world who, inspired by the American model, have adapted it for their own. And it is especially true for all eligible American voters this year because of our highly polarized political atmosphere, and the strange but seemingly real attraction of fascist and authoritarian mindset in some sectors of America’s ruling elite, one of whom happens to be the other of two candidates vying for the highest office of the land. Our faith journey – as native born Americans, and as immigrants like myself, have found full and unfettered expression under an atmosphere where every person is worthy in the sight of the law, because they are valued in the sight of God. And for me, there shall not be any question what choice I will make at the right time. For the choice I will make, like that of others, will make what we would continue to be.

Our faith journey often focus on values in the religious sphere. It needs a healthy dose of balance from concerns in the public square, where the transforming influence of grace and hope we offer and share as followers of the way will be at play. Those on the journey of faith who minimize, even shun or ignore the significance of political discourse or activity for one reason or

another are not doing themselves a favor for doing so. As followers of the Lord Jesus we are called to utilize our rational gifts fully to contribute to the fulfilling of God's plan for community in all aspects of life. Even politics, where the seemingly most simple of activity, voting at the ballot box, require not just the right information and assessment of the issues, but also our commitment to truth and of our fealty to what is right against wrong. That's where the choice we make, that make us today and into the future. It's decisions like this one where the wise counsel of the writer to the Ephesians makes a lot of sense to be "strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power." It takes courage to opt for what is right, especially if it did not coincide with our usual comfort zone. When we find ourselves confronted by that kind of moment, what we do in being strong in the Lord and in the power of his strength will move mountains. That's why Joshua's words packed such power for his time; and why it still makes sense for peoples around the world. And for people in America during an election year like this one in 2024! AMEN!

Joy and peace,

Pastor Ben

Rev. Dr. Ben Vinluan