



We just finished elections 2014 and already the focus has shifted to 2016 and the potential candidates for president. The balance of political parties has shifted and we wait to see how ideologies will play out in Washington and the various states where changes have occurred.

Who's on first? Will Congress and Washington finally see a way to get things done, or does the shift in party numbers really mean nothing when there is such animosity between them.

In auto racing, there's a term for late season events: the "silly season." A time when people do things that are just plain silly because they are jockeying for position. They all want to be first. Somehow who they are- their value as a person- is all tied up in being first. In being noticed. In "getting ink."

Joshua, the leader anointed by Moses at God's direction, to take the people of Israel into the promised land, calls the elders, the heads, the judges and the officers of Israel together just as they were about to take the step into the life the Lord God had promised. Joshua reminds them, as representatives of the people as a whole, that what they are about to do is momentous – and the choice they are about to make- has consequences for the rest of their life.

Joshua, in good story-teller fashion, reminds them of where they came from. Of God saying to Abraham, "go forth and I will show you the way." And how Abraham left his home and traveled believing that God was calling him to a new life, even though Abraham didn't have all the details before he got to where God wanted him to be. And there were undoubtedly uncertainties and hardships along the way. Surely there were times when Abraham felt all alone and questioned what he was doing. But Abraham believed in his relationship with God- that God was leading him and his dependents into a better life even though Abraham didn't have a map, didn't have the details all worked out in advance- didn't have a GPS system to tell him the best way to go. Abraham persevered and was blessed. Abraham becomes the father of three major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and his descendants are numbered as many as the grains of sand and as many as the stars in heaven.

Each of us has a moment in our lives when we face the question that Joshua puts to the leaders. "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" ...or Who?

Remember your ancestor Abraham and see the results of his choice. Blessings of a long life, blessings of family and descendants, blessings as being one revered as “righteous before God.”

Telling the story helps ground us. The psalmist says we will “recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord, and the wonderful works he has done... so that they might put their trust in God, and not forget the deeds of God, but keep his commandments” (Ps. 78: 4, 7). Telling the story grounds us and informs our choices.

When we know what has happened in the past, it helps us have hope for the future. “I love to tell the story”, the hymn lyrics read, ... “because it satisfies my longing as nothing else can do” (Katherine Hankey “I love to tell the story”). Joshua reminds the people of their story and tells them that we cannot stay rooted in the past. “Choose *this day* whom you will serve.”

As leader, Joshua needs to know where the people stand. Are they with God and with him? Are they going to follow the old ways and work against his leadership? Joshua knows that if they are divided, the work set before them will be much harder if not impossible. He needs to know where the people stand- to whom will they give their loyalty.

The people respond: “we will serve the Lord!” I imagine Joshua took a very deep breath and then said: “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” Joshua, relieved that they have chosen to serve the Lord, now can get on with the task given to him. To be a leader whose heart is set upon God. And so the people and Joshua made a covenant.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties in which certain things are agreed to be done or agreed not to be done. God made a covenant with Abraham that Abraham would be the father of many nations because Abraham was faithful to God. God made a covenant with Noah – that never again would God destroy the world through flood. The symbol of that promise is the rainbow. And God makes a covenant with the people of Israel that they will be protected if the people honor God and keep God’s Word. A covenant is a time when we come together and agree to do certain things or agree to refrain from doing certain things.

Our Catechism tells us that a covenant is a relationship initiated by God, to which a body of people responds in faith (BCP 846). Human beings have no way to force God to keep God’s part of the covenant, but we believe, in faith, that God will keep God’s promises to us.

Sometimes called the “new covenant”, the incarnation of God in Jesus represents God’s call to us, then and now, to be in relationship with God. To set our hearts upon God as the source of light and life and the source of our redemption from sin and evil. The promise we make to love and honor God, through faith in Jesus the Christ, is met by God’s promise to us of eternal life.

Each week as we celebrate the Eucharist, we are reminded of this covenant. In Matthew’s Gospel and in the words of our Eucharistic Prayers, we say: “And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28; Eucharistic Prayer B).

God is a God on the move, as one writer puts it. God was present with Abraham, with Noah, with Joshua and the people of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. And God was present when God became most known to us through the incarnation of Jesus. And God still asks of us, as was asked of the leaders of Israel long ago: "Choose this day whom you will serve." I hope your answer is the same as that of Joshua and many, many since then: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.... The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey."

Today we formally gather in and we celebrate the pledges made to support the work of St. John's throughout 2015. Your pledge witnesses to your choice that you have chosen to follow Christ as lived out in this community and this time. We are part of the great cloud of witnesses that stand for love of God and love of neighbor and love of self. The three are inextricably intertwined. If we do not have appropriate love for ourselves as temples of God, we cannot love our neighbors and we cannot truly love God. The three are intertwined to produce a healthy relationship and future.

Chapter 25 of Matthew begins a long conversation between Jesus and his disciples, including the necessity to be watchful and faithful. He reminds the disciples that we do not know God's plans – we do not know the hour or the day when our life will be demanded of us and we will be called to account for that life on earth. He queries the disciples to define who is faithful and wise and who is not. Sometimes that is an easy answer and other times it is not. And so we get to the parable of the 10 bridesmaids. It is a bit odd and it can be hard for us to find relevance to our own lives. We no longer have 10 virgin or young women waiting to escort a bridegroom to the bride. We no longer depend upon oil lamps for light- just flip a switch and there is plenty of light.

One possible understanding of this parable is that each of us is responsible for our own actions. We are the light of Christ when we feed the poor or visit the sick or tutor a child struggling to understand long division. We are the body of Christ when we gather for worship to glorify God through word and song and prayer. We bring the realm of God closer to earth when we pledge, enabling St. John's to offer a safe place for meetings, or we gather clothes to feed the nearly naked. In all the various ways that St. John's and each of us reaches into the world, we are helping to bring about that vision of God that all are cared for in the ways that each one needs to be cared for. We also are the body of Christ when we gather for fellowship either here at St. John's for the Travelogue or at the upcoming White Elephant dinner and gift exchange or traveling to the Indy Eleven game. In all the myriad ways that we interact with each showing our love of God through our actions on earth, we are living the dream of God that each of us will know we are the beloved children of God. All this, though, requires a choice.

A choice to be present at St. John's on Sundays for worship. The best evangelism is showing up and wholeheartedly worshipping on Sunday. When the pews are full, visitors are inclined to return. When the pews are empty- when, for example, we have forgotten the oil needed for our lamps- we're not a place where a visitor is inclined to return. Be present. That's a great gift to yourself and to God. When you are fully present, you are living out the choice to serve the Lord, this day and every day.

22 Pentecost/Proper 27

November 9, 2014

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Having given your heart to God, know that God has given God's heart to you. We do not walk alone. We walk with God, this day and forevermore. ***Amen.***