

He is our God – Joshua 24: 1-3a – 14-24

How many of us are good at making choices? In a restaurant we immediately know what to order, we can choose between different colours and styles when it comes to clothes or cars or furniture. And how many of us are not so able to make those decisions? Perhaps we have a fear of missing out if we choose one thing and by default close down all other options?

There is the old joke of the man being approached by the armed robber – it used to be approached by a masked man but as we are all masked nowadays it doesn't have quite the same menace. So the armed robber approaches the man and says 'Your money or your life'. There is a long pause and silence. The robber impatiently asks 'well? – don't rush me the man replies – I'm thinking it over.

Today in our lectionary reading we find the Israelites having to make a momentous choice as well , a reading that reminds us we too have a choice to make.

So finally we are in the Promised with the Israelites. We have accompanied them on their journey from cruel slavery of Egypt, across the Red Sea. We have witnessed their trials in the desert with little

food and scarcity of water. We have heard their complaints against Moses their leader, against God. The Ten commandments were handed down on this journey and we saw them as well as the Golden Calf and heard the pleading of Moses to God to keep his promise and fulfil his covenant. This group of people have had highs and lows – losing Moses but accepting Joshua as their leader. Have wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, surviving battles and driving out those who fought against them and now. Well now you can almost hear the collective sigh of relief – they have arrived at the Promised land – enjoying land they had not cultivated, living in cities they had not built, eating grapes and olives from vines and trees they did not plant. This was the time to sit back and smell the roses – their journeyings finished. But Joshua had one last thing to do. He had to get the people to once and for all make their choice.

It would have been tempting to forget the heartache and sacrifice and difficulties that had gone before. Why look back when there was so much to look forward to? Why relive the pain when life was no good? So meticulously and in detail Joshua reminds his people of all they have endured and begins by telling them and remember you once were also a people who worshipped foreign gods. God chose them from a position of marginality. He did not owe them, he was not beholden to

them – he chose them to be his people so from remembering what has gone before – all gratitude should be given to God alone.

Joshua is plainly speaking – yes isn't it great we have arrived and are able to enjoy the abundance of a rich, fertile, safe land to call our own. But don't forget where you have come from. Remember what it was to feel like an outsider – to be offered welcome and to be considered part of a beloved community. And then when you remember decide. Decide what you will choose. Decide who you will choose.

Are you going to go back to the worshipping the gods of your ancestors or are you going to choose to worship the God who has done everything to bring us to this point?

After all the people have been through you would imagine this would be an easy option but rather like the man pausing in answering the robber, Joshua knew how fickle they could be. Remember all the grumbling and complaints against God and Moses? Remember the rebellion when Moses left them alone for a while? Remember the disobedience and the wilful breaking of commandments? So no Joshua maybe wasn't too confident what the answer would be. So he forces the issue and demands the people choose. His choice is clear – as for my family and me – we will serve the Lord. He can only choose for himself – it is now up to each individual to choose as well.

Now after such a stirring speech the people have been reminded of God's goodness and constancy. His faithfulness and patience and so they do affirm God's saving power – they go even further in their affirmation than Joshua – declaring He is our God - of course we are going to serve him, why would we seek a different way?

And Joshua has one last sting in the tail for his listeners. It is not enough to say you will serve the Lord, you have to live it. All other gods in your life – have to go – there can only be one God. It will involve sacrifice and pain. It may mean living with resistance to what you believe. It is allowing God to challenge and discipline and guide and direct – rather than having complete control over your own life – are you willing to do that? No sugar coating – this is difficult. And the people reply No we will serve the Lord.

And Joshua tells them – then get rid of those foreign gods you have. Even as they swear allegiance and faithfulness to God Almighty they still have their little foreign gods – once a choice is made – all other options are gone. The people had to choose. And after being reminded of all God has done the Israelites dare do nothing other than affirm their faith in the LORD. There is only one viable way forward: to love this gracious, terrifying God who demands passionate, lifelong service with all the heart, soul, and might.

Joshua 24 invites each hearer into profound gratitude for the unmerited graciousness of God. Covenant becomes a matter of discerning who God has been to us and who we are called to be—this is true of Israel's enduring covenant with God and it is true of the new covenant that we as Christians affirm in Jesus Christ.

A choice is still involved. A choice that still calls us to get rid of our little foreign gods which for us is love of anything more than the Triune God. Love of money, popularity, social standing, sport, hobbies, music, travel, social activities – if any of these things are above our love of God then they become our foreign gods and we are being told to get rid of them and choose who we will serve today.

We have journeyed with the Israelites and we leave them now in that Promised land – the covenant fulfilled. But we have still some journeying to do. We are still in the wilderness of this pandemic. Still unsure what our promised land will look like. Still uncertain of the paths we are yet to take, of the kind of community God is calling us to be.

There is much we do not know but the choice remains the same. We are given a continuous opportunity to remain faithful in our daily living. No-one else can make that decision for you. Only you can decide who

you are going to serve as we continue in this wilderness together.

And as a community bonded by common love and faith my prayer is that we will each be able to say He Is our God and we will serve the Lord.