

Joshua 24.1-2a, 14-18

Psalm 34:15-22

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:45-69

May the words of my mouth and the secret meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and redeemer.

AMEN

Living in the Adelaide area, only an hour from a right whale nursery, a question bugged me. “How do whales sleep?” Along with other fish of course. I finally found the answer... researchers believe that whales can put _ the brain to sleep while the other 1/2 keeps watch.

I don't know about you, but between the heat and the humidity of Florida summers I think more than _ my brain has gone to sleep!

Which led me to review some of the story of Joshua.

First an important thing to remember. There was a rule among the Israelites, that sacrifice to the Lord

God, could only happen at one altar, the place that God chose.

Now once Moses died, the Lord spoke to Joshua, telling him to take the Israelites who had been wondering in the desert for 40 years or so, into the promised land.

There were many battles.. and in all of them, no matter how big the locals, it was Joshua and his crowd with the help of the Lord God who prevailed. And so a new community began to emerge.

They were ordered to demolish all the places where the nations worshiped their gods.. and use only the place in Canaan that the Lord God chose!

With the land basically conquered, Joshua arranged where the tribes were to settle. Two and _ tribes were sent across the Jordan to Gilead.. while the rest stayed on the Canaan side of the Jordan.

On the Gilead side, the tribes built an altar to the Lord God..

Now, if I haven't put you to sleep, maybe you can guess what happened next.

Those on the Canaan side prepared to go to war with those on the Gilead side because they had built an altar in the wrong place!

Oh dear. The emerging community is about to split. Many might die, over the question of where God could be worshiped.

Luckily there were some in this budding community that were very diplomatic. Not an altar for sacrifice.. but an altar that would make sure our children would know that we worship the Lord God.. that it would be a witness to the generations that come after us a witness between you and us that the Lord is God.

War was prevented! And the new community relaxed, and grew together.

A number of years passed in relative peace, according to the story.. "the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around" .

But still around them were the remnant of the locals, and the local gods were still worshiped.

When Joshua approached old age he called all the tribes together and summoned the leaders, the elders, the heads, the judges to present themselves before God.

Now I wonder what Joshua had heard via the local grape vine. Yes, he realized his death was near.. but what rumors, or comments had he heard about what was going on at the edges of this developing community. Had he heard or just wondered if some of the 'flock' was straying.. mentioning the names of other gods, or even worshiping them with the locals in the country?

Or maybe it was just a time for this emerging community to re affirm their allegiance to the Lord God.. the God who had done so much for them.. and who had brought them safely to the promised land.

"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 service the Lord.... Choose this day whom you will serve.”....

And they responded.. far be it from us to forsake the Lord... therefore we will serve the Lord for he is our God.”

“But Joshua continued to challenge them.. God is a jealous God.. if you forget.. he will turn on you.. and do you harm...

Oh, no they declared.. The Lord is our God and we will serve and obey..

I have read on in the story.. and it makes me wonder.. how many of those who made that commitment were just carried away by the excitement of the moment.. who at that time actually believed they meant it.. but when they got back home.. and time went on.. and they had more to do with the locals.. this promise slipped by.. a little at a time... until..

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.. and worshiped the Baals.. and abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors.

Again and again the current leader.. or judge called the community back to worshiping the Lord.. until they strayed again.

God’s emerging community was having a very hard time to develop.

The disciples of Jesus.. not just the 12 we are familiar with.. but the crowd.. were challenged by the difficult teachings of Jesus.. and many could not continue.. they left.. This cannot be our god.. he is asking too much.. its all too hard.

Only a few stuck with Jesus.. “You have the words of eternal life.. we believe you are the Holy One of God.” There is no where else, no one else to whom we can go.

And yet, I expect you remember that even Peter.. the rock.. a leader of the disciples fell away when it looked like any friend of Jesus would die with him on the cross that day!

The emerging community of disciples looked strong at one moment, but when challenged by the political powers, gave way, ran away, denied they knew Jesus, and hid. Their dream of the kingdom... would not come.. Jesus their leader was to be crucified.. the future they expected was destroyed.

Phyllis Trickle in her book *The Great Emergence* tells us that we are in a similar situation.. our world is changing.. our church is changing.. again the world is in a very difficult stage.. She describes how every 500 years or so, the world changes dramatically...and the church, the Body of Christ, has major rummage sales... Think of the reformation.. and how that changed the church.. 500 years before that it was the East West Schism and before that it was the coming of the Dark Ages.. before that, Jesus.. before that Joshua...

We, the Body of Christ, in the 21st century are cleaning out our attic.. our basements and again preparing a giant rummage sale.. of all that no longer serves us in this post-modern age..

I have had to clean out my parents house at their death, and my own when I moved. It is hard!

So many things bring back positive memories.. but have long since outlived any other usefulness. Like the very ragged dish towels a friend refused to throw out.. memories of his mother. Or the favorite toy long since discarded by the child.. furniture that you always planned on refinishing but never got around to doing...

The Israelites had a huge sale.. getting rid of all the gods of the past... choosing only the Lord God.. and it took many years for it all to happen.

The disciples 'sale' included the image they had of the kingdom Jesus was bringing.. His Kingdom was very different.. no longer rulers sitting on his right and left..but leading many of them to be witnesses even unto death..

The giant rummage sale of the 21st Century Body of Christ is underway. We are uncertain. We can not picture the church which is emerging. We are asked to trust God.

Joshua's words call to us... "Choose this day whom you will serve..." Yes, we are here today.. choosing to serve the Lord our God.

But the word of Jesus.. "abide in me"... "or do you wish to go away"... continue to challenge us daily.

It is an individual choice.. as in our body each of the trillion cells need to make the decision to do its job properly.. or our bodies become diseased.. so each of us.. as 'cells' of the Body of Christ need to continually choose to keep the Body healthy, and renewed.

And especially in this time which Trickle defines as *The Great Emergence*, the challenge comes to us over and over.. and the choice must be made each day.. sometimes each hour when new information tries to encourage us or tempt us to 'slip'.. even a little...

Do not forsake the God who had brought us to this place... through all dangers and snares.. who has

protected us through all upheavals in our world and our church..

Choose this day whom you will serve.... choose today and each day which follows to be faithful to the Lord God that the gathered church may show forth God's love to all peoples.