

# Homily, August 24, 2003

Proper 16 in Ordinary Time/ Pentecost 11/ Trinity 10

**Joshua 24:15, St. John 6:68-69: “Grant O Lord that Thy Word only may be spoken and Thy Word only received, + In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”**

*“Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of 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.”*

**I...** As I returned from a vacation to celebrate my Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, I came home to many upset over General Convention's actions on Human Sexuality. Not all calls were from our own parishioners, many came from Episcopalians in distress over these recent changes in our Church's Moral Theology. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of these calls, God gave me a Scripture...and that is not usual, but it was so clear a quote I just had to go to my concordance and find it. Low and behold it is in today's Old Testament Reading. My standard response to the actions of our National Church and our own Bishop's praise of those decisions. My response is Joshua 24 and 15: *“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”*. If you interpret that to mean St. Paul's by-the-Lake will not be jumping on the latest band-wagon of our Western Culture- you discern rightly.

But there is even more here in today's Scriptures, which call us to a renewal of that faithfulness to the religion, we received from our Christian forbearers in the Anglican tradition.

**II...** In today's Old Testament lesson, after Moses, Joshua leads the people of Israel to establish themselves in the Promised Land. But in so doing they had to deal with the Canaanite and Amorite cultures. There was much assimilation going on, so that some of the pagan worship of many Gods (polytheism) came to be practiced by the Hebrews. Joshua calls them to a choice,

for he sees a new apathy developing towards their Hebrew Faith. Much like those in our culture today who feel all religions are the same and are apathetic to real-committed Church-going Christianity. For them and us, what we call “convenience” over rules obligation, or what our Prayerbook calls “our bounden duty”. So Joshua says to us as to those of his generation: Make a Choice: Other Gods or The Lord! The other gods are not only the gods of other religions, but the gods we make of our culture of materialism. Fortunately Joshua’s story ends with the people making the right choice. But will we?

**III...** This is why I choose Joshua 24 and 15 as my response to the present crisis in our province of the Anglican Communion. Indeed a crisis affecting our whole Communion of Anglican Churches. This crisis is not just in Joshua’s time, or ours, we see it in today’s Gospel from St. John. Last week and today we run into those grumbling about Jesus’ teachings of true religion & faith. Many followers are saying ‘*these teachings are too hard, who can accept them?*’ But not because Jesus said THIS IS MY BODY, but that by claiming His Blood is for Eternal Life. Well that’s just plain blasphemy for many of the Jews. It makes him equal to God. His claims to come from God are not acceptable, after all they reasoned, “*We know his parents, Mary & Joseph.*” So today Jesus asks His own disciples “*Do you also wish to go away?*” He challenges them to choose whom they will serve, which leads St. Peter to those great words of faith: “*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*” (St. John 6:68-69) And this is no small choice; it has ramifications and implications for our whole life- every decision we make. I think of it (to use a contemporary example) as the tension between a baseball pitcher and the runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base. It is a match of wills- will the runner try to steal 2<sup>nd</sup> base, or play it safe? The pitcher has to have a good, quick eye to catch such an infraction. The choices they make are crucial to the game, and it takes commitment to one or the other, for if he runs there’s no going back. And you can’t have it both ways, you must choose, the safety of 1<sup>st</sup> base or the gain possible for stealing 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**IV...** The Desertion of some of Jesus' followers is a choice they make. In John's Gospel this is a prelude to the Paschal Mysteries of Holy Week, where all but a few, His Blessed Mother and St. John, will end up deserting Him. Holy Week, like today's readings, is all about a choice:

**Why do we believe Jesus is Lord and Savior?** Is it only for the signs, wonders and miracles that you might get from following Him? Or do you choose to believe as St. Peter in today's Gospel: *"You are the Holy One of God, there is no other."*

And that is the only right reason of Faith. And this is why we remain in His Church- *"Lord where can we go?"*- You alone are Lord and Saviour. So even when the Church errs and strays like lost sheep, where else is there to go? We are asked today: **Why to you believe in Jesus?** All sorts of studies try to show why people drop-out of Church. What I think they often miss is that many of those who leave never had the real commitment type of Faith that Joshua and Jesus are referring to in today's Scriptures. The type of Faith that lets us look past the faults, failings and sins of those Human Beings who make up the organization part of any religion. Faith in Jesus Christ is a hard choice- there is a tension between it and the culture we live in everyday. A culture that says all religions have the same God, and are just a different way to get there. It is a hard choice to believe in Jesus because this has implications on **HOW** we live in this culture and **HOW** we deal with human faults, failings and sins. Faith will, and rightly should make you a little uncomfortable, influencing every choice we make. And maybe herein is the irony, because it is only with this Faith that we will all find what we all really want: The Peace of God- that we now see does pass all understanding.

*"Lord, to whom can we go? As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*

**+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**