

## **SERMON: 26 August 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **“Choose life”**

**(Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18, John 6:56-69)**

Its in the book of Deuteronomy that Joshua is commissioned to lead Israel into the land the Lord swore to give them, delivering it to them as their inheritance (31:7).

Joshua is told by God to be string and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, he will neither fail you nor forsake you!

In many ways, Joshua’s seems to me a bit of a thankless task, (though surely nothing commissioned by God could ever be thankless). Moses knew, when he was handing on the baton to Joshua, that the people would turn their backs on God after his death. In his lifetime, Moses had seen the grumbling and the rebelling. Here’s what he says,

“I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt and will turn from the path I commanded you to follow” (31:29).

But Moses still gives the people the words of the law, saying, “these instructions are not mere words - they are your life! By obeying them you will enjoy a long life in the land you Arte crossing the Jordan River to occupy” (32:47).

The Bible tells us that Joshua was “full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. And the people therefore obeyed him” (34:9).

The Book of Joshua begins with the Lord affirming this commission to Joshua, with the words, “everywhere you go, you will be on land I have given you .... No one will be able to stand their ground against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses ..... be strong and courageous ... don’t be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (1:3-9).

And we know that the Lord was faithful and he gave them the ground he’d promised to give them. Joshua’s work was done. He could only lead them

into the land. Now it was up to the people to choose to live God's way or not.

Joshua encourages the people to choose God. He says to them, "serve the Lord alone. But if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (24:14-15).

The people declare that they will do the same. Joshua's example has spoken loud and clear to them and they commit to standing with him with the Lord. Joshua's last act is to witness the people's decision to choose life, to choose to serve the Lord and obey him alone (24:27).

In the Gospel reading, the disciples and the crowds listening to Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum also faced a choice. Would they still go after this Jesus or not? Would they risk believing that he was who he claimed to be?

For many of them it was too much. All this talk of eating flesh and drinking blood had perhaps been the last straw. But the Spirit is at work in Jesus. According to John, Jesus says, "it is the Spirit who gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (6:63) (and) "people can't come to me unless the Father brings them to me" (6:65).

Simon Peter makes the right choice when Jesus challenges him to make a decision as to whether or not he was going to leave with the others who were deserting Jesus. "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life" (6:68).

So what might all this mean for us? Clearly, God presents his people with choice. And, in a sense, there is not a moment goes by where we are not faced with a choice. Each day presents us with countless choices to make.

And it seems to me that God has given us the opportunity and the means to make good choices and its all wrapped up in our decision to choose life because to do so is to choose to side with God, with truth, with justice, with love.

In every decision we face we can ask ourselves which decision is the one which most closely chooses life.

If we go back and have another look at the choice that Joshua presents the people with, we can see that they could choose between, the gods of their ancestors, ie to choose to live in the past; or they could choose the gods of the Amorites in whose land they now live, ie to choose to go along with the current culture of the world, or there is the choice to choose to serve the Lord, which is the choice to choose life.

So the wrong choice is to choose to live in the past or to choose to go along with the current culture. To choose life is to choose to live in the present moment and to live in a counter cultural way, a heaven on earth way.

But I want to rephrase that a wee bit because that makes life sound like hard work. Maybe a better way of saying it is that the best choice is to allow life to happen in us, and its that God breathed life which is now, and is heavenly, and is counter cultural in so many refreshing ways, that it inspires us to move and act and think and pray in creative, life giving ways in whatever we find ourselves doing.

Life, then, is something which happens in us and through us, and we can rest from striving as we let the Spirit of Life, which is the Spirit of Christ, work his grace in us.

So why not choose to let this life happen in you and through you, and let's stay together and I think we'll see God more and more clearly in our church and in our community, our homes, and our workplaces.