



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021
JOSHUA 24:1-2, 14, 15; JOHN 6: 60-69
PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

It is so good to be back in the pulpit! Someone last Sunday said Al, I just sense you are ready to be back preaching and I am so excited after a sabbath rest to be back preaching! Let me begin with this question, a kind of audit question for your life. It's this:

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING?

Very first thought?

I'm going to be real with you and say the obvious, it's late August, October is coming therefore my first thought is: Did the Red Sox win last night? Do they have hope for October! Don't judge me...Gamecock fans, we're right up there, do we have a chance this year with a new coach! Clemson fans, can we punch our championship ticket this year!

Most of us though wake up with one of the following first thoughts. We think of:

1. Money
2. Children
3. Politics
4. Worries
5. Anxieties
6. Pandemics
7. And did I say our children?

My friends, in every serious way, your first thought in the morning, my first thought in the morning is our god. Whatever we wake up to first, has taken center stage and is god. When we look at the Bible, there is no evil so condemned in Scripture than idolatry...it is the central cancer of the Old and New Testaments. What is idolatry? Best defined this

way: Worshiping and serving anyone or anything but the living God as our God in our lives. Put another way, Idolatry is inappropriate devotion to some-thing or some-one that holds illicit leverage or sway over our time, resources and priorities. Again, boil it down, it's what we think of first in the morning.

There are three forms of idolatry.

1. First, worshiping another as our God, like saying, all religions are the same, all roads, whether Jesus, Allah, Bhudda all take us to the same place. That is idolatry.
2. Second form of Idolatry is a bit more American, and that is to Reinvent Jesus into our own image, making Him what we want Him to be verses who He is in Scripture! I call this 2nd form of Idolatry the idolatry of the buffet line. I will believe in this about Jesus, but not that, regardless of what Scripture says.
3. Third form...Giving our worship that is due to God...i-e...giving our devotion, full surrender to something-someone.... beside God.

Idolatry, what do we think of first in the morning?

Hold that thought and let me take us into the terrifically powerful book of Joshua. An amazing 24 chapter book capable of blowing our socks off. To understand it, a quick turbo lesson on it. By the way, as a shameless aside, I'm coming out with my first book this fall called: Turbo Bible, giving thumbnail sketches of each book of the Bible. Joshua in 2 minutes or less!

Moses had just brought the Jews out of Egyptian captivity into the desert. When Joshua opens up, Moses is dead and Joshua is his successor..with one goal: Take the people out of the desert and into Canaan, the promised land. If Joshua were running for office, that would be his one and only platform, I will take you the land of grapes and honey! So the first half of Joshua is all conquest... defeating city after city through the hand of God Himself.

Joshua makes it clear that every victory was not because of their power, but because of God's strong hand. Joshua basically here describes the story of the founding of the Hebrew people, again coming to pass not through human genius but by the hand and the will of God. Joshua driving home the point that nations are great not in proportion to their military prowess, but in proportion to their dependence on God.

But then everything changes in Joshua chapters 23 and 24. Think about it this way. As your know, our Bishop, Bishop Mark Lawrence is retiring this year. Imagine on his last day our Bishop inviting each of the 22,000 Anglicans in our diocese to a huge field for his final talk..Here is what I want you to know, and to do. That's where we find Joshua today.

Joshua leads a rally at Shechem, modern day Jordan, just a tad north of Jerusalem. Final chapter, first verse, they were all there for the big rally, the elders of Israel, heads, judges, officers...What an incredible vision! This was before microphones! Joshua goes on to give history-His-Story, God's story of how the Jewish people were saved time and time again by God Himself! To put this in perspective, Bishop Lawrence is barely 70 years old, Joshua at this time is about 110, so I think we could ask our Bishop to serve another 40 years don't you?

Joshua is now saying focus with me on one thing, together, let's make an exclusive treaty with God. And that treaty, again, final words of Joshua, we pay attention to any person's final words. Joshua says in response to what God has done for us, put away all idolatry, there can be no other gods in our lives. Joshua says this because he knows that some of his generals had not driven out completely all the Canaanites and their gods from the promised land of Canaan. There was still a temptation by the Jews to worship the new gods they had never heard of, to be changed by their culture instead of transforming their culture. If you worship other Gods says Joseph, than the one true God, you will vanish from the good land God has given you.

Which is why Joshua forces the most important question in the history of the world: Who will you serve? God who had proven time and again his trust-worthiness or the local gods which were only man made idols. Who will you serve? God like a passionate spouse, wants an exclusive relationship with you, He doesn't want to be added to your collection of all others. Forsaking all others, be faithful to Him as long as you shall live?

This is Joshua's final heartbeat.
CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE
AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE
WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.

My friends, we are right there at that rally. Our gods have different names, but come with the same temptations. Those three forms of idolatry are tempting for us today...

- 1) Worshiping another as our God, thinking all religions are the same. After staring at the images of Afghanistan we are once again reminded of the lie that all religions are the same. What we are seeing in that nation is not a political war, but part of an Islamic movement to take over the world. We must wake up to this fact. Sharia Law is not extreme Islam, it is in fact main stream Islam and is as counter from Christianity as you can possibly get.
- 2) Making God into our own image. If I'm offended by the claim Jesus made in today's Gospel reading from John 5 and 6 that there is no other God who can save us...we begin to soften that and put words into the mouth of Jesus that He never said. This is the chief reason the Anglican church split from the Episcopal church, we cannot make Jesus into the image of our culture.

- 3) And the 3rd challenge we have today, giving worship due to God to something else. For parents, it's letting the schedules of our children drive us from God, from worship! Sunday travel ball has killed many a faith... for others, it's hobbies that take us away...our jobs the list goes on and on...

But today is the day to stop and say: In response to all Jesus has done in my life, I choose Jesus, as for me and my house, we will serve Jesus. I say Jesus because Jesus is the new Joshua! The Hebrew spelling of Jesus is Yeshua which is the same as Joshua, meaning the Lord is my salvation. Like Joshua, Jesus has led his people through the waters of death, to bring them to the promised land! For Joshua, that water was The Jordan River and the promised land was Canaan. For Jesus, those waters are the waters of baptism and our promised land is heaven! But Jesus did what the old Joshua could never do, save His people forever, not just for a time, but for all time!

Like Joshua, Jesus is standing before us now calling all of us to make the great choice, the single greatest choice every individual, every church, every society must make because this choice determines the meaning and purpose and point of life itself and even determines life or death for eternity! Who will you choose?

It was that Bible Scholar Henrietta Mears who said: The greatness of your power, is the measure of your surrender. The greatness of your power, is the measure of your surrender. It is not a question of who you are, or of what you are, but whether God controls you. Choose this day. Surrender. Will it be God or the world? This is a daily choice which requires Holy Spirit Discipline. I know it sounds crazy but each and every morning I'm confronted with: who is my god today? I know I should be better than this, but on many a morning I'm opening my Bible when I would rather check a baseball score, praying when I would rather be reading what happened at Fenway the night before.

This is a discipline. Each day is its own lifetime, it is a daily decision, a daily discipline. How do we do it. Every single night, going to bed praying Come Holy Spirit, I surrender the day past, but Holy Spirit through your power may the first thing I think of in the morning be you. And when you wake up in the morning, going immediately not to your phone for the news, or scores as hard as that is. But going straight to Scripture, to our Bible in year ministry, or the Bible Journey curriculum, surrendering yourself immediately to the Lord.

What you do first determines your God. The greatness of your power is the measure of your surrender! Choosing Scripture is saying Jesus today, I surrender! I choose you to shape everything I do today! Moms and dads, before school starts, gather the children for Devotions in the morning. Men and Women of the empty nest, before life gets going, choose this day by choosing Scripture! Not just out of duty, but out of the victory Jesus has won for you! It is daily a daily choice! If we allow the gods of this world to overrun

our lives, we will never make an impact on this world! We won't be living out our true purpose.

I end with this. Early in the summer I taught my son Hudson and nephew Jacob how to drive a stick shift car. It was a Friday night. We were on Edisto Island and that Sunday as we do once a year, we attended the Beach service of Trinity Anglican Church on the Island, and to our delight, Bishop Lawrence was the preacher. Again, this was three days after I taught Hudson and Jacob to drive a stick shift. Bishop Lawrence begins his sermon saying the Christian life is like learning to drive a stick shift car. That immediately got all the attention of the teenagers. His point, our entire spiritual life can be spent in first gear, never maturing, never growing, never making the impact on our culture we were designed to!

Yes, getting into second gear requires Holy Spirit discipline to say Jesus, today I'm choosing you, third gear is God speaking in response to you, 4th gear is God leading you in ministry and transforming the lives of others! And it all begins when your eyelids open tomorrow, who will your god be?