Proper 27A

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St. Dunstan's

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Who Will We Serve?

"Choose this day whom you will serve."

It is a defining moment for the people of Israel. Slavery is behind them, the long years in the wilderness are over, they have at last arrived in that land that God promised to their ancestors Abraham and Sarah so many generations ago.

They are no longer nomads without a home; they are settlers in their own nation.

At this major junction in their lives, Joshua, who has become their leader after Moses' death, summons the people together to make a foundational decision concerning their allegiance and their identity.

He recites for them the long history of God's interactions with them, God's deliverance and promises, going all the way back to the beginning.

Those promises have been fulfilled and now the choice is up to the people.

What kind of nation will they be?

Who will they serve?

The God of Abraham and Sarah, the God who brought them out of slavery, the God who sustained them in the wilderness and brought them to this land -- or some other god?

The people don't hesitate. As one they cry, "We will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

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This week the people of this nation were summoned to make a choice, a foundational decision concerning our allegiance and identity.

This week we were asked these questions:

What kind of nation will we be?

Will we choose compassion and kindness or cruelty and degradation?

Will we choose to say that all of our people are equally valued citizens or will we choose white supremacy, misogyny, and homophobia?

Will we choose to be a place of welome to immigrants, or will we build walls to keep them out?

Will we be a nation that accepts people of many faiths or will religious minorities continue to live in fear?

Will we choose to care for the earth or will we choose to pillage and pollute it?

Will we choose science or will we choose ignorance?

Will we choose truth and facts or will we choose lies and fiction?

Will we choose healing and unity or will we choose deeper division?

Will we choose hope or will we choose despair?

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The choices we were called to make this week were framed as civic choices. And voting is, indeed, our civic responsibility.

But voting is also our moral and Christian responsibility. How we vote says everything about what kind of God we choose to serve.

When the people of Israel cried as one, "We will serve the Lord, for he is our God," they weren't just saying that they would give lip service to God, attend synagogue occasionally, celebrate religious holidays.

They were promising that they would serve God by following God's commandments, the ways of life God laid out for them in the wilderness.

Those weren't just mandates for individuals; they were instructions and commands for the nation those people in the wilderness would become.

In promising to serve the Lord, the people were promising to be a nation that cared for the poor, that took care of widows and orphans, that welcomed the immigrants.

They promised to be a nation that valued truth, that cared not only for one another, but for those on the margins of society.

They promised that the blessings they had received would not be hoarded, but shared with others so that their nation would become a blessing to the world.

They promised to show their love for God by loving and caring for their neighbors.

Joshua knew that being this kind of nation was not going to be an easy task. That's why he says to the people, "I don't believe you can do it."

But twice more the people insist they can; that they will, indeed, serve the Lord; that they will be a nation of compassion and generosity and truth and inclusion and love.

This week I know that many of you, like me, were anxious as we waited to see what kind of nation our fellow citizens would choose to be.

It was a long week filled with sleepless nights. On Tuesday night I felt myself becoming more and more depressed as the returns came in.

But as Psalm 30 says, "Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning."

And indeed, each morning this week seemed a bit more hopeful. Ultimately we did choose to be a nation of kindness and compassion, generosity, truth, inclusion, and love.

This is a time to be joyful and to celebrate, but we do so knowing there are difficult days ahead.

The coronavirus is still raging among us, causing untold sickness, death, and despair.

The economy is still in shambles, inflicting hardships on those who can least afford them.

The sin of racism and white supremacy still have deep roots in this country.

Children on the border are still separated from their parents.

The planet and many of its people and creatures are still in peril from climate change.

A new president and vice president will have to face those realities. But we have chosen leaders who we trust recognize the problems and will work to solve them, not to exacerbate them.

We have chosen leaders who seek to serve the nation, not to elevate and enrich themselves.

It will not be easy. There is work for all of us to do. The nation is deeply divided; not all celebrate the choices the majority of us made this week.

There will be setbacks and mistakes and days of discouragement.

But today we affirm our allegiance and what kind of nation we choose to be.

Today we rejoice, look to the future with hope, and say we choose to do the hard work of servimg the Lord.

Amen.