Earlier this week, many of us went to the poll to cast our ballots on this year’s election. Regardless of what party affiliation you may be, when we take part of this annual democratic process on Election Day, we engage our civic duty and exercise our rights to voice our opinions in electing who will represent us and lead us.

 As Christians, it is part of our calling to engage in (or at least be aware of) what’s happening around us in society. On one hand we honor our faith and trust in our sovereign God, while on the other hand, we take on this huge risk by placing our trust and faith in those whom we elected, bear in mind these individuals are just as fallible as we are to human misjudgments and sins. Not only must we “choose wisely” with our minds, but we must choose wisely with our hearts.

 As we’ve seen throughout the Bible, faith and politic do often come hand-in-hand…one affects the other. **Even Jesus himself was heavily involved with the politics of his time. He was an activist challenging the system of social injustice of the civil law while upholding the moral teachings of the spiritual law.**

 Through our Old Testament lesson this morning, we come upon the story of the Israelites finding themselves having to make some difficult choices. As we recall last week, the Israelites were about to enter the land that God had promised, after spending the last 40 years wandering out in the wilderness. As the LORD guided them across the Jordan River to the edge of the promised land, their faith was challenged once again. They needed to strategically figure out a way to conquer the land and to overtake the occupants who were already there. These people were physically much stronger and bigger than they were, and they were probably out-numbered as well. This was no Thanksgiving Day parade or a walk in the park. But they knew that the battle belonged to the LORD and not on themselves. They had confidence that they would prevail at the end.

 As it turned out, these battles were another test of their faith and allegiance. Would the Israelites place their trust in their own ability or in God’s? Through their faith and obedience, they had chosen wisely, not upon their own strength and power, but God’s. Joshua was able to lead the Israelites in conquering the land of their enemies and settled into the land that God had promised them.

 However, once they had settled into the new land, they found themselves living among “strangers in a strange land”…in a land of pagans and worshippers of other pagan gods. The Israelites’ faith was challenged once again by those whom they must co-habitat. How were they going to live alongside with these pagans and they followed different customs and rituals. Some even inter-married with the local pagan god worshippers. **How soon had they abandoned their faith and forgotten about their God? The people’s allegiance to God was being tested not only during times of challenges but even more so in times of prosperity and blessings.**

 Joshua was not pleased with the disobedience and the sinful behaviors of the Israelites. Their faith had been compromised. Joshua summoned all of his leaders and reminded them that they must “*not to associate with the other gods, by invoking their names or swearing by them. They must not serve them or bow down before them”*[[1]](#footnote-1)As the LORD clearly commanded in the very first Commandment that **there shall be no other gods before Him**.

 At the age of 110, Joshua realized that his days were numbered and soon he must pass the torch onto the next generation. But before his curtain was lowered, he wanted the next generation to affirm their allegiance and promised not to surrender their faith in the one and true God Yehweh. In a public ceremony, Joshua declared before his children and his children’s children that ***“as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.***”[[2]](#footnote-2)

 In the same way, each day we are being asked to make many difficult life choices, one after another. We must choose between God and the “others” forms of God, as we are being confronted with various temptations and other influences of this world.

 **Our allegiance is being challenged by the choices that we make and priorities that we choose. This struggle is real, and is getting harder and harder, as we strive to find the proper balance by choosing wisely living as Christians in a secular community?**

 It is not easy to live as Christians and uphold some of our values in a secular world today. Some may have compromised their faith with worldly values, in their pursuits of education, career, relationship and other worldly successes and achievements. These influences have become a form of distraction, or even obsession at times, at the expense of compromising our personal relationship with God.

 Furthermore, in light of the many human caused tragedies (such as terrorist attacks in a park, mass shootings at a concert or even in a church) or natural caused disasters (such as hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes), **our faith and our allegiance in God have also been tested.** We pause and asked ourselves “***where is God in all of this? How could God allow such tragedy to occur? Why did so many innocent people have to die or lose everything of their lives? Has God abandoned His own people?****”*

 We do not have a simple answer to these questions, because we are not God. There is a lot that we do not know concerning God’s ultimate will and purpose. Yet in the midst of seeming human tragedies, hardships and challenges, God continues to call us to be witnesses of His love and to be ambassadors of this world. When our backs are against the wall, or as we stand at the edge of the river like the Israelites, we have no choice but to keep our faith and trust in the Almighty One who would lead us into the Promised Land. *“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

Secularization distances us from our relationship and our dependency with our true God. Instead of fixing our hope on Christ’s coming in our lives, often times we focus on what we must do for ourselves, in order to satisfy our present earthly needs and personal desires. This is a slippery slope that we must avoid and resist falling ourselves into.

 With the upcoming holiday season upon us in the weeks ahead, our faith and our allegiance will once again be tested. How we invest our time and our resources matter! How do we devote our lives in self- discipline and choose to serve matter! So we must choose wisely! As Jesus said*, "****No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and what the world has to offer at the same time****.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 In the parable of the 10 bridesmaids that Steven read for us earlier from the New Testament, those bridesmaids also had to make some tough choices in anticipation of the bridegroom’s arrival. Five of these bridesmaids came prepared with sufficient oil for their lamps while the other five did not. Those who did not were caught off-guard and short-handed when the bridegroom was delayed and showed up at the least expected hour. Those who had chosen wisely brought extra oil for their lamps, so they had enough oil for their lamps to enter into the wedding banquet. Those who were unwise, however, were left standing in the dark and found themselves looking in from the outside.

 Now obviously, this wedding banquet is only a parable signifying the Kingdom that is to come. Each day that we live here on earth may be seen as the bridesmaids’ longing hour of preparation, waiting, and yearning for Christ’s imminent return. No one, not even Jesus Himself, knew exactly the date or the hour of his imminent return, only the Father knows. [[4]](#footnote-4) Nevertheless we must stand ready, be prepared and choose wisely. But when it comes to our faith and our preparation for that day to come, we must choose wisely and be prepared.

 This does not mean that we would drop everything we normally do and wait for Christ’s return. I don’t think that’s what God has in mind. God wants us to go about our everyday life business by bearing witness to our faith, so others may come to know who we are and who God is. “Why we do what we believe and who we are living for?” Just as Joshua told the Israelites that they must “***choose whom you will serve this day. Incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel****.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*  Since the day of creation, God has established this covenant relationship with us. God intended for humankind to remain in Him, as He remains in us, like a tree with its many branches.[[6]](#footnote-6) As one theologian summed up our text this way, John Buchanan wrote, “*Our Christian hope rests on trust that the God who created the world will continue to love the world with gentle providence. God will continue the process of creation until the project is complete and will continue to redeem and save the world by coming into it with love and grace and in Jesus Christ.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

 God will not easily abandon His people. God will continue to choose us, even though at times we might have abandon God and choose other gods or other forms of god in our lives. This is a story of human redemption and God’s grace and forgiveness, as it precludes the coming season of Advent. God is willing to give us a second chance (third or even fourth chance…etc.) even though we have failed and rebelled against God so repeatedly. Time after time, we have chosen unwisely to serve other gods instead. This is why a Savior was sent amongst us, to redeem us and to save us, as we cry out, “Lord, Have mercy on us!” **We have chosen wisely…**

Friends, we all have been invited to take part of the LORD’s wedding banquet. The invitation doesn’t say what day or what time the banquet will start, but one thing we do know for sure is that we better come prepared and be well supplied with oil when the bridegroom does come, or else we will be left in the dark, looking in from the outside.

So how do we do that? Well, **Keep our eyes and ears opened to see what God is actively doing around us. Look out for opportunities that we may engage in God’s witnesses and callings all around us. Keep God’s word and our prayers well in stock, in our back-pockets and in our hearts, so when unexpected life trials and challenges do come, we will surely be ready and prepared to fulfill God’s will and purpose in our lives.**

 **As Jesus said, “*We are the Light of the World*”[[8]](#footnote-8), we must keep our light of faith shining in the days and nights ahead, until Christ returns once again.**

 **Life is full of unexpected choices and some choices may bear greater consequences than the others. May every choice that we make, be a proclamation of our faith and a reflection of our allegiance to our once and retuning Savior.** In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Joshua 23:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Joshua 24:15* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 6:24* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Mark 13:32* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Joshua 24:15 and 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *John 15:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Buchanan John M. *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* p.286 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Matthew 5:14* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)