Earlier this week, many of us went to the poll to cast our ballots for this year’s election. Regardless of whether you’re Democrats, Republicans or whatever party that aligns best with your views and values, on Election Day, we all exercise our rights in choosing who we want to represent us in this democratic process. We may or may not agree with each other 100% on every issue, and that’s OK, that’s what make us unique and different. Nevertheless the power and the choice are at the hand of the people and we pledge to do our best to work together as “*one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty, justice for all.”*

Although our vote in the election may affect our everyday living such as how funds are to be allocated, how much taxes we will be paying, our life often calls upon us to make more critical choices than who we put into office. These choices are more crucial than filling out a bubble sheet at the poll and push it through a scanning machine. **Our decision to follow Christ in saying “YES”, bears life transforming consequences not only in this life, but for our life eternal.**

In the past couple of weeks, our Old Testament lectionary text, as Steven read for us earlier, has invited us along the faith journey of the Israelites. The people of God had entered and conquered the land that God had promised to them, after 7 long years of battle with those who were much bigger, stronger and size-ably out-numbered. With God on their side, the Israelites were able to defeat those who were occupying the land. They eventually divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israelites. Each tribe will govern their own and populate it, as God had covenanted with Abraham. Even though they had moved in and settled, they were not out of the wood just yet. There were still many challenges lying ahead of them.

The Israelites once again found themselves to be “strangers in a strange land” and at odd with those whom they must co-habitat. Once again God was testing their faithfulness and allegiance. Who would they choose to follow, now that they’ve been granted what they were promised…in the land of “milk and honey”? Life was now good…but have they forgotten who got them here in the first place?

Some may have even inter-married with the locals and adapted to local customs and religious practices. Joshua felt that the people needed to be reminded of *“not to associate with the other gods, to invoke their names or to swear by them. They must not serve them or bow down to them”*[[1]](#footnote-1) for the God of Yehweh is a jealous God and there shall be no other gods before Him.

At the age of 110, realizing that his time may soon be over and pass on to the next generation, Joshua gathered all of the leaders of Israel and called for a ceremony to rededicate their commitment and allegiance to God. In spite of all of the outside godly influences, that is the gods with a “g”, the God of Israel - Yehweh remained their choice of whom they would follow…for their children and their children’s children. The people had spoken once again in response to what God had spoken to them! ***“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD***”[[2]](#footnote-2) as Joshua declared.

Every day we are being asked to make tough choices between God and the “others”. We are constantly being bombarded with persuasive influences of other forms of gods and temptations of the world. Our allegiance is being challenged by the choices that we make….how we spend our time, our money, our commitment, our energy and resources.

One of the exercises that I often do with those who come through my confirmation classes is what you see in front of you, as part of the insert. You see there is a drawing with a series of concentric circles representing our sphere of influences in our lives. Think of some of the activities in our daily lives….such as works, school, eat, sleep, things that people do for fun and recreation, personal devotion/church…etc. Where do they fit in around these concentric circles….if God is in the middle? Basically *what consumes most of our time on a given day?* Similarly if we place ourselves in the middle of the bull’s eye, where might God fit in the midst of all of this?

*“Where is God right now in our lives? Does God remain the core of our beings or do we marginalize God and make him a periphery in our lives?”*

Each day our faith is being challenged by the “worldly” influences around us. Christ continues to call upon us to be God’s witnesses and be ambassadors of the world. The pluralistic society that we live in today is not very different from the days of Joshua and the Israelites.

The world that we live in has become more and more secularized and that God is no longer at the center of our core being. God is being replaced by “others” and even by “ME” at the center of the sphere of influence. Society influences our mind in telling us that we don’t really need God anymore and that we can do whatever we want based on our human wisdom and understanding. We’ve been persuaded into thinking that **faith has become just something we do, an activity or a spiritual practice rather than the essence of who we are and what we believe.**

Secularization distances us away from our relationship and allegiance with the true God. It sets our minds and our focuses off God’s radar. Instead of fixing our eyes, our hope and our anticipation on Christ’s coming in our lives, we focus on what we must do best for ourselves NOW, in order to satisfy our earthly needs and personal gains. This is a slippery slope that we, as well as our future generation, must avoid.

Like the 10 bridesmaids whom we read in our New Testament lesson earlier, the 5 who were wise came prepared with sufficient oil for their lamps while the 5 who were foolish did not have enough oil. They were caught off-guard and short-handed when the bridegroom arrived at an unexpected hour. Those who were wise made sure that they had enough oil on their lamp. They were ready when the bridegroom came and were all invited into the wedding banquet. The rest were left stranded outside in the dark. Those who were wise made the right choice in anticipation of the bridegroom’s arrival.

This was one of those eschatological parables that Jesus used to teach about the Kingdom that is already here and is yet to come. Each day we live may be seen as a day of preparation for Christ’s imminent return as our bridegroom. But that 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 “why we do what we believe and who we are living this life for?” It’s not about ME, but it’s all about God. This is the choice that you and I have made.

**Our choices become very clear….choose God and be on the watch OR choose the world and miss out on invitation to the heavenly banquet.**

Jesus calls us to “stay awake!” in a metaphorical sense, that is God does not want us to remain idle and wait for Jesus’s return. God wants us to be on the look-out while keeping our eyes opened of what’s going on around us. Satan will always find ways to disrupt God’s plan for His Kingdom. **God wants us to fix our eyes upon the coming of the bridegroom and be ready to respond to the invitation to the heavenly banquet.**

God has established this covenant relationship with us since the day when God first created us. God intended for humankind to remain in Him, as He remains in us, like a tree with its many branches.[[3]](#footnote-3) Throughout the course of human history, God has declared a choice, an investment in each of us, by embracing us in spite of who we are. Through our response in faith in baptism, we have made the right choices in our lives, so that others may also come to know God and also be invited into the Heavenly banquet alongside with Christ.

Our text today reminds us of what actions we must take and what choices we must make NOW preparing to receive what God has already installed for us. One theologian summed up this text by claiming that our “*Christian hope rests on trust that the God who created the world will continue to love the world with gentle providence, 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.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Friends, whatever God does for the world is God’s business in God’s timing. You and I have an important role in God’s plan by anticipating that day when the bridegroom shall return. We’ve been given a task to prepare ourselves and to equip others in making proper choices within God’s sight.

This heavenly banquet is the greatest assurance and promise that God has prepared for all those who believes. This is the joyous hope as we journey through the rigors and challenges of life. **May every choice that we make be a proclamation to the world that Christ WAS and still IS among us right now, and that Christ shall return once again to re-establish His Kingdom for all those believe in Him.** 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. *John 15:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Buchanan John M. *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* p.286 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)