

23 Pentecost 2020

Gracious God, you have given us an inheritance of eternal life; yet we care more for the temporary things of this world. We are overburdened by our anxieties. Have mercy upon us. Grant us the strength to overcome our fears and the courage to bear suffering without being defeated by it. Free us to live in the joy and peace of Christ.

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. I used to have a t-shirt with this printed on the front. It is one of my favorite bible verses. Joshua was giving the Israelites a choice. Serve the gods of the Canaanites or serve the God who had saved them. This then brings up an important question for each of us; Who do we serve today?

A significant moment of the last century, occurred in January of 1968 when Malcolm Muggeridge resigned as the Rector of the University of Edinburgh. He resigned because he would not be party to the relaxation of rules which permitted students to be provided with birth control pills and their attitude of the potential benefits of using LSD. An article had been published in the student newspaper advocating the use of LSD as a means of realizing one's potential, and providing advice on how and when to take the drug. The Students' Representative Council had also passed a motion calling on the Student Health Service to provide the contraceptive Pill to female students on request and without a doctor's prescription.

Facing a booing, hostile crowd, Muggeridge addressed the students with these words:

“The students of this university are the beneficiaries of centuries of selfless scholarship. You are supposed to spearhead progress and to carry on the torch of humanity. Speaking for myself there is practically nothing that you could do in a mood of rebellion against our impoverished way of life for which I should not feel some degree of sympathy. But how

infinitely sad, how macabre that the form of your rebellion should be a demand for drugs, for the most tenth-rate sort of self-indulgence ever known in history. All is prepared for a release of new life. We await great works of art, the spirit of adventure and courage, and what do we get from you? Self-centered folly. You are on a crazy ... slope. For myself, I always come back to the King, to Jesus, to the Christian notion that all our efforts to make ourselves happy will fail, but that sacrifice for others will never fail. A man must become a new man, or he is no man. Or so at least, I have concluded, having failed to find in past experience and present dilemmas any alternative proposition. As far as I am concerned, it is Christ or nothing. Goodbye and God bless you”.

There was actually a lot more to this story than his remarks portrayed and Mr. Muggeridge was far from being a saint himself. However, he resigned from the post he had held for less than 2 years for the reasons he stated above.

It also doesn't matter what we think about his decision, especially looking back at it in 2020. For the most part, societal norms have changed although using LSD is still not a very acceptable way to realize one's potential.

I am guessing that the students made their decisions based upon the culture at that time and that religion had very little effect if any. On the other hand, Rector Muggeridge based his decision to resign on his beliefs of what Jesus required of him.

In doing some research, the Israelites had lived in Canaan about 40 years by the time of our story this morning. Prior to that, they had wandered in the desert another 40 years. So, it is not a huge surprise that many of them had forgotten the history of what Yahweh had done for them or had at least not found fault with adapting some of the culture of the locals. This

included worshipping the local gods. Joshua had seen much of this happening and he also knew that his life was coming to an end.

In CH 23, Joshua tells the leaders and judges of Israel, ““But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, 13 then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.”

As we are told, the Israelites chose God. But as we also know, their dedication to God, waxed and waned frequently as time went by. We see evidence of this in the parable of the ten Bridesmaids and Jesus’s warning to the Jews, and to us, to stay awake and to be prepared for his return. Assimilation into the culture of society is still an issue for all of us today.

There is a term called code-switching. The phrase comes from the study of linguistics, and it's used to describe people's ability to switch back and forth, quickly and often, between two dialects or languages that they speak well. For example, if you're comfortable speaking both English and Spanish, you might, when in the company of others who are similarly bilingual, start a sentence in one language and jump halfway through into the other. People do this culturally also.

It's not unlike the old expression of "wearing a different hat," depending on the situation. A woman might speak and behave one way while having lunch with the girls, but behaves

and act differently when back in the office. A successful person knows how to switch roles between being a parent, a spouse, and a working professional at the office.

Matt Thompson, gave this example in an article entitled; "Five reasons why people code-switch":

"A lot of folks code-switch not just to fit in, but to actively ingratiate themselves to others. We cannot tell you how many dozens of stories we got from people who work in service industries who said that a Southern accent is a surefire way to get better tips and more sympathetic customers. Apparently, everyone who works in a restaurant picks up "y'all" immediately upon arriving at their job. If you can pull off the right accent in the right context, you can get all kinds of favors, as this story from Patti Hollingshead illustrates:

"We lived in Ireland some years ago and noticed there were often two prices for goods and services -- reasonable prices for the locals and much more expensive costs for others (Americans). It was not easy, but I practiced my Irish accent until we qualified for 'local pricing.' Still, they would often ask me where I was from, as my accent was anything but flawless. But I'd come up with the name of some obscure town hundreds of miles away, which explained my 'odd' Irish accent and usually satisfied them. Once, to my, 'Ack, I'm from dahn towards Clara Bog,' the guy responded in Gaelic.

"I had no idea what he was saying. I continued to smile, laugh, and nod at what I hoped were appropriate times as he excitedly talked on and on. Finally, another English-speaking customer entered the shop and he flipped back to English then whispered to me, 'We need to be careful here (in Northern Ireland) about speaking Irish.'

'Oh, aye,' I replied.

"I pulled my wallet out to pay for my flowers and he held up his hands, 'No, me lass, keep yer money. 'Twas a pleasure speakin' to ya."

When I look at everything that is going on within society today, I see many folks who are good at code-switching. In the case of Christians, it is often times done innocently enough, but in other cases not so much. A person who never misses church on Sunday but treats people of color poorly at the office. A Christian employer who pays his female employees less than the males doing the same job.

These are things that are never OK. But the fact is, while some may have received Christ and never looked back, but if we are being honest, most of us have had to rethink and recommit to Christ at different points throughout our lives. That's not to say we "backslid" in our faith, but rather that, as maturing occurs in both thinking processes and life experience, there were moments when we had to look at our faith commitment and ask, "Do I still affirm this?" or "Can I commit to what I now understand Christ's call for my life to be?" I know that I have done this for sure. And as we reaffirmed our commitment to follow Jesus, we emerged with a new dedication better suited to deal with the challenges of both daily living and the occasional crises that come to most of us.

Yet there are times when we will shape events and circumstances around us for our benefit at the expense of others. Those are the times that we need to stop and ask ourselves; Who do I serve? There will always be those who openly profess that they do not believe in God or Jesus and live their lives accordingly. And those who say they are Christians but live in a manner that shows no evidence of it. I do not presume to know anyone's thoughts or intent. I leave that to God. But actions do speak volumes.

I wonder how many have died from COVID because of those who felt that their right to not wear a mask, outweighed the risk to others. I wonder how many people of color did not have to die at the hands of others. I wonder how many children of immigrants did not have to be forcibly separated from their parents. I wonder why so many Indigenous people, in this country, go without running water every single day. I wonder why so many people go days without a meal. I wonder why people treat each other with so much anger and even hatred. I wonder why people are treated with less dignity than they deserve. Yes, I wonder a lot. But there is a lot that we, as Christians, **should** be wondering about.

Do we practice what we believe? Do we believe what we profess?

Timothy Brown tells of a hospital visit he made to a young man, also named Timothy. The patient had clearly decided that his commitment to Christ still applied despite the fact that his life was being taken from him, one blood cell at a time, by a vicious and unrelenting leukemia. Because the man was so weakened, Brown knelt next to his bed to look at him eyeball to eyeball. "Hi, Tim," he said, and the patient responded, "Hi, Pastor."

There followed an awkward pause because Brown didn't exactly know what to say. The long, dark shadow of death seemed to make chitchat meaningless.

Finally, the dying man broke the silence by saying, "I have learned something."

Brown said, "Tell me, what have you learned?"

Tim said, very faintly, "I have learned that life isn't like a DVD."

Perplexed, Brown said, "I don't get it. What do you mean?"

The patient responded, "Life isn't like a DVD -- you can't fast-forward past the bad parts."

As Brown knelt there, Tim the patient said, "You know what else I learned?"

"No, I really don't. Please tell me."

"I have learned," Tim whispered, "that Jesus Christ is in every frame, and right now it's just enough."

Most of us do the very best that we can in situations that we find ourselves in, because we **do** believe in a loving God and because we **do** love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The gospel is good news because it tells of a God who does not let us go and a Jesus who is with us through everything. That **is great** news.

So, when you ask yourselves, at the start of every single day, "Who do I serve? You will respond as Joshua did, "But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." Amen