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What Kind of God do You Want?

The Rev. Barbara Ballenger

Good morning. Welcome to church. What kind of god can I get for you?

I mean there is an endless selection of gods out there. In today's world you really can't be too choosy.

And as Joshua tells the people of Israel in today's first reading, you gotta choose. Even if you think you don't have to believe in any god at all, that's the same as choosing.

Because there are so many forces that are bigger than we are individually. So many higher powers. So many gods out there -- that if you don't choose, they'll still choose you. And you will end up serving them eventually.

So it's best to be proactive. What kind of god do you want?

We have the standard models -- like the god that will make you feel good no matter what -- it just requires a higher and higher dosage over time, and there are side effects. There's the god of the intellect -- this one's mostly in your head. Oh there's the one that comes with a work ethic -- the harder you strive, the more blessings you get.

Mammon, the love of money -- always a popular choice. And there's always Caesar, the god of empire.

There are several new models that come with your internet plan -- like the one that allows *you* to have the followers as long as you never leave the screen, and the one that knows your deepest appetites even before you do.

And then there's always the God of Israel, AKA the One True God. Though I have to warn you that I have personally heard several complaints about this One lately. I have been told, and here I'm not kidding, that this God is bossy and mean. I have also been told that this God is jealous, vengeful, judgmental, misogynist, and angry -- and as a result is very hard to market to current audiences. Often mis-labeled The God of the Old Testament, this God does get better reviews in the

Christian scriptures, though it must be said that the God of Joshua was also the Father of Jesus. Same, same.

So what will it be? What kind of god do you want to covenant with? Which is to say what kind of god will you ultimately serve with your life choices and relationships, with your time and your other investments? In fact, if you look at those things, you may discover that you've already made your choice.

This is the question that Joshua asks of his people many years after their God had delivered them to the promised land – and it's a fair one. Joshua, you may recall, took Moses' place and led Israel out of the wilderness after their long sojourn there. Today's passage comes at the end of the book of Joshua, whose namesake is at this point over 100 years old.

It's a rather edited version. So we don't hear Joshua's detailed description of the God that Israel knows – who delivered them from slavery, guided them through the wilderness, won battle after battle for them as they took military control of the land of promise.

Israel understands that this is all God's doing on their behalf. Not their doing. Not the work of their former gods or their neighbors' gods. And given that, Joshua asks his people to be clear. What god do they want: the God they know or the god they don't know?

And the people answered: we want to serve the God who delivered us.

Are you sure? asks Joshua. Do you know what you are getting into? Do you recall that this is a jealous God? This God will not let you go so easily, and will demand all of you. This God does not like it if you see other gods on the side. Don't say I didn't warn you.

And the people insist: this is the God we want. We choose to serve this God.

And so Joshua ultimately sets up a new covenant between God and Israel that day at Shechem, one of several we find in the Hebrew Scriptures.

So it may be that every once in a while we should revisit our commitments, and ask ourselves when we are gathered in assembly before our God, as we are today: have we really chosen this God? What kind of god do we want? Is it the God of Israel, who revealed Godself in Jesus, or some other? Is the god we want the god

we have covenanted ourselves to? And what does it mean for us to serve that god?

We are reminded in today's Gospel that after his long discourse about being the Bread of Life – he lost followers. Perhaps it was because it defied what people thought they knew about God. They couldn't look beyond what they knew. What kind of god do you want? Jesus was asking. Because this God – his Abba -- was intent on feeding them with the life that the divine one placed in Jesus. And just like Jesus was no kind of bread they ever saw, God's life is unlike any kind of life we have ever experienced. That is what's meant by everlasting – not just forever, but uniquely belonging to God.

Do you want a God who desires to share everlasting life with you? What kind of god do you want?

If you ask me, this is the kind of God I want: I want a God who delivers.

I want a God who delivers ... me, who delivers us ... from the life that kills us to the life that sustains us.

When I think of that word delivery – I think of being brought to the proper destination. I think of the Amazon truck that visits my street several times a day. I also think of birthing, when a woman delivers her child from its temporary home within her to the one where it will spend the rest of its life. The day my mother delivered me, was the day life as I know it really started. It was also the day her life as a mother really began.

So given that, I want a God who wants me, and who is with me all along the way. A God who knows who I am, and where I am. I want a God who will miss me if I'm gone. Who wants me back. Who has my back.

I don't want a god who stands by and judges and judges and judges and only applauds on those rare instances when I get things completely right. We have people for that. Many of them coach in the Olympics or enter politics. People make terrible gods.

And I do not want a designer God that is mine alone – like a personal trainer, or coach, or fixer. Because I'm weary of the isolation that our worship of individualism has fostered. And I long to be knit back into a larger interconnected

and appreciative body, one that doesn't split apart so easily when it is disappointed or disillusioned.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua tells the people of Israel. When I was a kid we had a little plaque sitting on a side table with those words on it. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. I grew up in such a house, which is largely responsible for the faith that put me in this place today. Though I think my Catholic mother believed I chose another god when I became an Episcopalian.

Which is say that we who choose the God of Israel may still have very different experiences and understandings of that One, True God. Our understandings shift from one book of the Bible to the next; change over time from ancient to modern, and vary across faith traditions and divisions and distinctions; they develop throughout our own personal journeys from birth to death.

The work of faith is to be able to discern that One True God over time, as our understanding deepens and changes. It is to acknowledge the shrouding nature of mystery, the limits of our human interpretations.

But the work of faith begins by acknowledging our own need for deliverance. We often have a clearer picture of what we hope to be delivered from than what we might be delivered to.

For Jesus that delivery destination is very clear – it is the heart of his entire ministry, it is what lies at the end of the way of his cross, and it is what we receive when we consume his flesh and blood, his whole self, in our Communion bread – that destination is the very life of God.

Life that delivers and sustains.

Life that connects and unifies.

Life that does not end.

That is the life that is on offer here. Now what can I get you?

Amen.