

From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...

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Powerful Stand or the Wishy-washy Dance?

It has been a blessing in my life to have performed hundreds of weddings and funerals. I usually end up falling in love with the couple by the time they are standing at the altar. I have spoken with them, I have seen their love for each other, and I know their sincere desire to join in marriage. I also know what they're in for, which they do not. That is not a bad thing. It is a good thing. One of the most memorable weddings I performed was in an apartment. The bride became faint and could not stand for a while. She was, perhaps, more aware than most, what she was in for. But she carried on. After sitting at the kitchen table, with her head between her knees for a while, she straightened her shoulders, smoothed her hairdo, and went ahead with the ceremony.

I also witnessed a best man faint during the ceremony. I don't know what his issue was; maybe it was the heat. Or, maybe he was going to be married soon himself.

Getting married is a crossroads, of course. It is saying good-bye to one way of life, and committing to another, different, perhaps more demanding but (potentially) far more satisfying way. Marriage requires a lot: a lot of work, a lot of forgiveness, a lot of compromise, overlooking, humility, and selflessness. And if you do it halfway ("half-assed"), you will never reap the true benefits.

In our Scripture this morning, the people are at a crossroads. They have traveled far and been through much. They have been hungry, exhausted, confused and weary. They have sometimes even wished they could "go back" to where they "at least had some food on the table." They have bickered among themselves, blamed one another, blamed Moses, blamed themselves and blamed "the gods" for their difficulties and predicament. But now, here they stand. Joshua provides for the people the chance to take a stand. He doesn't just wave his arms and say, "Come on down, y'all. We finally here!!!" He makes a solemn vow himself and then he turns to his people.

"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond

the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

He makes no bones about where he stands. And he doesn't tell people that they have to feel and say and do the same way that he does. He just puts it out there. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Period. Will we be perfect at it? Oh, no. Will we have times when we are annoyed or dismayed by it? Oh, yes. Will we be rewarded with riches and blessings, happy, happy, all the time? Maybe. I doubt it. Who knows? But the choice is there in Joshua, and the choice is there with all of us. Not just one day, long, long ago. But every day, here and now, regardless of our circumstances, we, you and I, have the opportunity to be a powerful stand for our lives, or to do the wishy-washy dance.

What is the wishy-washy dance? I've heard couples say, "If it works out, we will stay." That's the wishy-washy dance. The wedding vows say, "With God's help, we will make this work, no matter what." That's a powerful stand. I told you before that when people get married, they really don't know what they're in for. That is to say, they don't know that there will be days they don't feel so madly in love with their mate. They don't predict that they may one day be attracted to another person and they will have to struggle through that with their vows in the forefront, if they want to preserve the integrity and strength of their marriage (and they will come out stronger, if they hang in there). They don't understand that there will be times when they just want to be alone and make themselves a sandwich and they don't want to even think about asking their husband or their wives, "Honey, can I make you a sandwich, too?" They are NOT aware that their own tastes might change, and they may want to go a different direction altogether in life, but well, you see, you've made this commitment to this other person. And, what about the fact that YOU like a nice, tidy home, with a place for everything and everything in its place... and him? Well, he just doesn't see why you need to make the bed when you're going to just get right back into it a few hours later. And, he just can't seem to remember to close a drawer ever, or put a cap back onto anything tightly, and why, oh why would you need to clean out the car unless you were going to, maybe sell it????

I counseled a couple who had been married 42 years and still were doing the wishy-washy dance. Should we stay in this marriage? Is it going to work out? Who am I and who is she? Really?

If you get confirmed or you (in my case) get baptized at a tender age, you may not understand what you are getting into. That's okay, because it's your stand that sees

you through. You don't know that you will be tempted and tried, and that you must take responsibility now, because you are (in the eyes of the church) a responsible follower of Christ. And, if you in effect say, "If circumstances are to my liking I will maintain my integrity, I will follow the tenets of my faith," then you are doing the wishy-washy dance. We fall down; we get up. We fall down; we get up. That may look like the wishy-washy dance. But it is actually a powerful stand. Because, if you continue to take responsibility and do the practice, you will be standing powerfully. That's why we renew our vows before God from time to time. That's why couples renew their vows. They want their love to stand the test of time. Powerfully.

Let me tell you what I think you miss out on by doing the wishy-washy dance. Peace of mind. When you're always considering your options, you can't be here now. You can't enjoy your surroundings, the one you're with, or your own sense of place and wellbeing. It's always scheming, wondering, flipping and flopping... Where's the peace in that?

Joy. Being unsettled about who you are in relationship to others and in relationship to God means that joy will be illusive, at best. Joy is for those who have stepped into the ring. Joy is for those whose faith carries them forward, warts and all. Joy is for those who know that nothing and no one in this life is perfect, but joy is there for anyone who is alive and grateful for where he or she is, right now. Joy is never found in the future or the past.

Momentum. Joshua knew that his people would not be solid as a people or as a nation if they did not take a powerful stand. The stand bucks circumstances. The stand keeps you going in hard times. The stand helps you look back and say, "We did this, with God's help. We did good. We feel proud." Momentum helps you access this place in life. Taking a stand gives momentum to any project, including lifelong projects, like a marriage, a church, or a vision for the future (in any setting).

Intimacy. You cannot be intimate with God or anyone, actually, unless and until you take a stand that "this is it."

Power. You cannot experience spiritual authority or power of any kind if you are not willing to get off the wishy-washy dance floor and take a stand.

You and I are given the choice every day to think, speak and act, in accordance with the stand we have taken when we were baptized or confirmed. We stand at a crossroads many times, to serve the one true God, or to serve another god: a god of self-doubt, a god of disparaging ourselves or another, a god of pettiness, selfishness, sneakiness or a god of some kind of addiction or action that diminishes life and makes

us smaller.

This day you and I can re-think what it means to be fully human. We can consider Joshua's question, which god will we serve? It's a good day for that.