

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Narrative Lectionary 1.6 – Reformation – Confirmation**  
**Joshua 24:1-26, selected verses**

**28 October 2018**  
**Salem, Bridgeport**

### The Only Thing That Satisfies

I still remember the day.  
It was the summer after 10<sup>th</sup> grade.  
I had rinsed my hair with a combination of peroxide and crème rinse,  
put on my bathing suit, snatched up a beach towel,  
and gone out to lie in our sunny front yard  
so that my skin would get darker and my hair lighter.  
I had a paperback book with me called “Jesus” –  
a novel that took all 4 gospels  
and put them together to form 1 single story about a singular man.  
It wasn’t my normal reading material –  
that would be romance novels or science fiction –  
but this wasn’t a normal summer.  
My boyfriend of the past year had broken up with me  
and as I tried to put the pieces of my broken heart back together,  
I had hoped Jesus could help.  
But that day I was feeling good  
because just a few nights before I had been on a date with someone else,  
someone who actually seemed much better suited to me than my previous boyfriend.  
While my former boyfriend had broken up with me  
because he said he needed to put God first in his life,  
this new guy said that God didn’t just get first place in his life, God got all the places –  
and I really liked that answer.  
I thought back to our date which had been so perfect  
and for the first time all summer my heart felt full.  
I knew this guy could be the ONE.  
And it was then that I heard a voice inside that said,  
“Be careful. Don’t rush into a new relationship.  
Take time to discover who you are – by yourself, and not in relationship to anyone else.”  
I heard the voice and I countered it,  
“But this guy is so perfect for me.  
I don’t want to lose out on this opportunity. If I don’t grab it now, I may lose it forever.”  
And the voice spoke again.  
“It’s up to you.  
But know this:  
whatever you decide now  
will pretty much decide who you will be for the rest of your life.”  
I ignored the voice.

In our reading today,

Joshua gathers all the people together and reminds them of all God has done for them:

- \* taken Abraham and Sarah to a new land and given them descendants – Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph, then the 12 tribes;
- \* brought the 12 tribes out of bondage in Egypt and through the sea;
- \* led them through the wilderness for decades;
- \* and finally brought them into Canaan, the promised land of milk and honey.

Joshua reminds them of all these amazing things God has done for them, challenges them to recommit themselves to this God who obviously loves them, and then is the first to recommit himself with these words:

*“<sup>15</sup> ... As for me and my household, we will worship God.”*

The people then voice their complete agreement.

God has indeed done all these things for them, and they, too, will worship God.

Just to drive home the point, Joshua reminds them,

*“... <sup>20</sup> If you desert God and serve foreign gods, after all God has done for you, you will bring disasters — fatal ones — upon yourselves”.*

If you desert God and serve foreign gods, don't expect for things to go well.

And by “foreign gods” I'm not talking about Baal or Ashtoreth, or Zeus or Venus;

I'm talking about whatever it is other than God

that we use to try to fill the void or emptiness in our hearts.

Blaise Pascal,

a 17<sup>th</sup> century French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Catholic theologian wrote that there was a craving, a helplessness in the human heart that we try in vain to fill with everything around us since not one of them can help, because this infinite abyss can only be filled with the infinite, with God.<sup>i</sup>

I think that if we are honest,

we all know that abyss, that void, that emptiness of which he speaks.

It's the emptiness I was trying to fill with a new love relationship when my heart was broken.

It's the emptiness others try to fill with money or material possessions, or the pleasure of sex or food.

That feeling of emptiness resonates deep within us – that desire to be filled and fulfilled.

Or it can be experienced as restlessness.

Saint Augustine who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries wrote,

*“You have made us for yourself, O Lord & our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”<sup>ii</sup>*

It's the restlessness that some try to fill with power or success in their career.

It's the restlessness that some try to fill with excitement in the adrenaline rush of never-ending activities.

That feeling of restless is something we all have.

We try to ignore at times, but still it remains,

our secular world of consumerism certainly visible proof of it.

It's not that love or sex, or money or possessions,  
or power or success, or activities or adventures are wrong.  
Every one of them can be used for good or to add joy to our lives.  
But when we expect any of them to fill that God-shaped void in our lives,  
they are ultimately going to disappoint.

And God knows that,  
which is why God spoke through Joshua to call the people back into relationship  
with the God who had created them.

In the poem "The Creation", writer James Weldon Johnson begins like this:

"And God stepped out on space,

And he looked around and said: I'm lonely — I'll make me a world."

7 verses, 5 days, and a universe later, the poem goes on to say that

God looked on the world with all its living things, "And God said: I'm lonely still."

Then God sat down...and God thought and thought, "Till he thought: I'll make me a man!"<sup>iii</sup>

That poem makes me think that maybe God started out with a hole, a void, a need in God's life,  
a need to create, a need to be in relationship, a need to love.

And being created in God's image means that we, too,  
have that same hole, that same void, that same need.

And so, God is in love with us, and desires nothing more than for us to return that love  
and to live in the light and joy of that relationship.

That's what the covenant ceremony in Joshua was all about.

It wasn't a bunch of dry and dusty words and rituals,

but a beautiful marriage ceremony, binding God and God's people together in love.

That's what Confirmation is, too.

Not just a liturgical rite of passage, but a call from God for each of you —

Elijah, Evan and Ashley —

to put God at the very center of your life,

not just today, but each and every day to come.

That's not to say that Israel always kept their promises to God.

They didn't. They failed again and again.

And it's not to say that I kept my confirmation promises to God. I didn't.

I certainly failed the day I ignored God's voice.

I wish I had listened. I'm pretty sure my life would have worked out a lot better if I had.

But the good news is that God's love never fails,

because God's need to be in a relationship with us was there from the beginning of creation.

No matter how many times we break the covenant,

no matter how many times we fail to listen to God's voice,

no matter how many times we chase after other gods

to try to fill the emptiness or restlessness inside,

God will always be there, calling us back and waiting for us with open arms,

ready to hold us and love us forever. **Amen**

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://theconstructivecurmudgeon.blogspot.com/2006/05/incorrect-pascal-quotes.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://augustinianvocations.org/augustines-restless-heart/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/creation>