

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia on Sunday  
November 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale  
“The Power to Choose”**

Joshua 24:15 “Choose!”

Professor Martin E. Martin writes, “I first became uneasy with the connotations of stewardship when Pope Paul VI spoke of being a steward of the ‘deposit of faith’. A deposit is placed in a hole, as in the Biblical parable. The term ‘deposit’ also implies locks and walls – a deposit is something to be guarded, as in a bank’s vault. I got the impression, listening to Pope Paul, that he feared the deposit of doctrines and gifts would run out if the church took risks or dispensed them lavishly”. The professor adds, “Many sermons on stewardship are attempts to pry ‘time, talents and treasure’ (mainly treasure) from believers who are presumed to be stingy! And the thesaurus says that stingy is the opposite of generous”.

Now I cannot speak for “many preachers” but I can speak for one... and this one does not presume “believers to be stingy”... no, I presume that believers, those seeking to grow as disciples of Christ in the community of faith, I presume that believers are to be characterized not as “stingy” but rather as “fearful, hesitant, unsure”.

To surrender ourselves to God is the key to spiritual and healthy living. Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, writes, “We had to quit playing God. It didn’t work. We decided that hereafter, in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He would be the Principal; we, His agents. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new triumphal arch through which we passed to freedom”. Surrender... “the new triumphal arch through which we pass to freedom”... it is not easy, it takes a lifetime... it is all preparation so that we can die well and surrender readily!

I believe most of us, at heart, want to take up one of this financial pledge cards for 2009 and give boldly and give generously and give with courage... we want to make the choice to do this but we seem to lack the will, the power... we are “fearful, hesitant and unsure”.

Let’s think a little about our Old Testament lection for today... Joshua 24. Listen to these verses from that chapter in the Message translation:

Joshua says, “Choose”. The people answered, “We’d never forsake God. God is our God. Count us in. He’s our God”. Then Joshua told the people, “You can’t do it”. But the people told Joshua, “No, no. He’s our God”. Joshua replied, “Say an unqualified yes to God”. The people answered, “What he says, we will do”.

I want, at heart, to be someone who says an unqualified yes to God... isn’t this the same for you? But it is a struggle... isn’t this the same for you?

So where is the power to make healthy, bold, courageous, generous choices? And though today, Pledge Sunday, we think especially about our money... far more important, is to discover the power to make healthy, bold, courageous, generous choices in the way we live... in the way we love. So today we think about the thankful giving of money to support and extend the work of God but also we have opportunity to think about homelessness – its chronic causes, its devastating and de-humanizing impact.

In Joshua 24 the people are told where to find the power to make the right choice... look back, look around and look up.

**Look back** – verse 6 “I brought your fathers out of Egypt”, verse 8 “I gave you the land beyond the Jordan”, verse 11 “your enemies fought against you... but I gave them into your hand”. Friends, when we have a vivid memory of how God has rescued us, of how God has blessed us, of how God has protected us... then we have power to make healthy, bold, courageous, generous choices.

**Look around** – Joshua speaks to the community of God, it is the community (the assembly, the gathering) of God’s people that responds. Verse 15 “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. We need one another and we need take responsibility for one another... lest we become freeloaders. Friends, when we look around we are encouraged, we are not alone... then we have power to make healthy, bold, courageous, generous choices.

Look back, look around and... **Look up** – verse 14 “revere the Lord, hold him in awe; serve Him in sincerity and truth”. Friends, when we worship the Lord... then we have power to make healthy, bold, courageous, generous choices.

The addict in healthy recovery, which I sometimes think includes most of us in one or another, the addict in healthy recovery wishes (for the sake of his/her life) to make the right choice today, each day, every day. That addict will often look back and remember that from which he/she has been rescued; that addict will invariably depend upon the “home group” for support and that addict will turn to their higher power from day to day, hour to hour... and there they find power to make healthy, bold, courageous and generous choices.

When I thought about the Neale pledge card for 2009, I know I needed power to make a healthy, bold, courageous and generous choice. I do not have that power, God does!

Step 11 in 12-Step Programs ends thus, “Praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out”... Lord, give us knowledge of your will for us... but especially give us the power to carry that out. **Amen.**