

What a week to be American. Since Tuesday we have been bombarded with images of unprecedented political interest, turnout, diversity, spontaneous international eruptions of joy, and homeland hope. John Stewart quipped on the Daily Show, a nightly comedy news program, that on November 5th he had experienced on the streets of New York, something frightening, something mysterious he had never before encountered...eye contact.

All week have been hearing, seeing and reading about every reaction from every quarter. It was, to quote EVERYONE, a historic day.

One topic that has gotten significant airtime during this process, and more so since the election itself, is the relationship between Obama and Martin Luther King Jr., many seeing this election as the day of his dream. It is within this conversation that references to Joshua, the hero of today's Old Testament lesson, have emerged.

King has been identified with Moses who led the enslaved Israelites out from under the oppressor, the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Moses, as we know, never reached the promised land itself. God led him up Mount Nebo and said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." And Moses died on a mountain overlooking the land of milk and honey.

Joshua, Moses' assistant, is then called by God and ordained by Moses to finish the journey, to lead the people across the Jordan River into Canaan their new home. And he does. Today's Old Testament reading finds us at Joshua's deathbed, post conquest.

Joshua has gathered all the tribes of Israel to the holy place at Shechem to invite the people to renew their covenant with God, the same covenant the Lord had initially made with Abraham. Joshua issues a compelling challenge to the gathered tribes, that they should choose to serve Yahweh, as *he* had chosen to do. Inherent in Joshua's declaration is that he would serve the LORD *alone*. He would not serve the LORD *and* someone or something else. There was one God in his life, and that God was the LORD. All *his* hope on Yahweh was founded.

“Now therefore revere the LORD,” he said, “and 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.”

And the people said to Joshua, ‘No, we will serve the LORD!’ Then Joshua said to the people, ‘Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.’ The people said to Joshua, ‘The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey.’ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day.

And so, now we have Martin Luther King Jr. as Moses, and Obama as the presumptive nominee for prophet/warrior Joshua who will lead America to glory. I first encountered this language November 4th. But apparently it has been in circulation since last march, when Obama spoke in Selma, Alabama and said this:

I thank the Moses generation; but we've got to remember, now, that Joshua still had a job to do. As great as Moses was, despite all that he did, leading a people out of bondage, he didn't cross

over the river to see the Promised Land. God told him your job is done. You'll see it. You'll be at the mountain top and you can see what I've promised. What I've promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. You will see that I've fulfilled that promise but you won't go there. We're going to leave it to the Joshua generation to make sure it happens.

Since that speech, the comparison has taken on a vital life of its own, beginning with the launching of "*The Joshua Generation Project*, an organized outreach to young people of faith granting them opportunities to stand up for their values and move the campaign forward."

Now a week before the election I explained to you all that we could not discuss electoral politics from the pulpit... but, you know how on those courtroom dramas someone will ask an outrageous question and the judge will over-rule the objection to it saying "you opened the door counselor."

Well, I have to tell you. This public appropriation of the Judeo-Christian story, demands some commentary from those charged with that tradition's preservation. In other words, Judge, they started it.

So here is a quote from a message board on the Project site:

We have now been pegged as "The Joshua Generation", the generation who is responsible for ushering in the promise of the forefathers who gave their lives to pave the way for equality. President BARACK OBAMA is the symbolic leader of this movement. However, this was an impossible task without the concerted and exceeding effort that **we, as a united people, undertook.**"

I am thrilled by the passion, the joy, the eye contact and yes, the hope. But I would be remiss if I did not point out a central flaw in this analogy. God got the Israelites through the desert *in spite* of Moses and Joshua and the persistently profligate Israel. They were rescued *In spite* of themselves. It is, in fact a central truth of our tradition, that God helps those who can't get out of their own way. Joshua was something of a skilled tactician, but this skill is not to be credited with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. No, God's faithfulness *in spite of us* is the real story.

On Joshua's deathbed, speaking in the prophetic voice he said : Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac... I gave Jacob and Esau... I gave... I sent ... I brought, I rescued you. It was not by your

sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.

‘Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.’”

It was not about Moses, or Abraham or Joshua. It was about God. God’s love and God’s faithfulness. And Joshua chose in these final moments of his life to revisit this litany of faithfulness, and to extract from the people a renewed commitment to thier covenant relationship.

The day after the election a pop-up window appeared on my Facebook page asking “What do you want Obama to do first? What should his first priorities and actions be?” Yesterday, during the morning tv news, I saw a question fill the screen, “What should the President-Elect accomplish by 2012.” This administration-to-be already has the reputation of unprecedented transparency and feedback seeking. It is in part what flairs for many, the hope for fair govenance in the years ahead. We just may matter. Someone cares

about what we want and need. And this is what we chose that day, by our quirky American means, we chose that day who would serve as our leader, who we thought would do the best job serving us.

But this was not the call of Joshua. No his invitation was for them to consciously choose— Choose this day whom you will serve. Choose whose you will be. Choose the one who will have the greatest command of your resources, towards whom you will incline your heart and to whom you will look for wisdom and strength. Choose this day who will be the Lord of your life. Not who will serve you.

Thinking this King/Obama comparison a fairly significant divergence of intent from the original story, I conducted an extensive review on all published materials regarding this discrepancy—I Googled it—I unearthed two oppositions to the use of Joshua as an organizing metaphor. One questioned his status as a *true Christian* due to his ambivalence about the existence of hell (an odd concern since it is a Jewish story.) And the second was a trademark infringement lawsuit from "Generation Joshua," a division of the Home School Legal Defense Association. Boy, are they mad.

One reason I believe this metaphor has met such paltry public resistance, is because many of us kind of think of God as a candidate for Holy Office. We check out all of the religions and see which one gives us what we need, and when it stops doing so we move on. Having pulled the lever, filled in the circle, punched the chad, we then provide God with a list of things we would like to see accomplished, preferably by 2012.

The call of Joshua is not who will be at your behest, but in whose service you will be enrolled. Not who will serve you, but which God you will serve. And it is not choose *if* you will serve, but whom, because the assumption is you are choosing something or someone already. The question really is whose are you.

Having asserted the faithfulness and absolute sovereignty of Yahweh, his God, the invitation of the Prophet was then, not to battle or heroism, but to relationship with the divine. The Bridegroom wooing his Bride, not for a vote, or even as vote as a means to a helpful social program. God woos just to have, us. To embrace and shelter and console us. In the Words of Saint Augustine "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The Church is God's bride! And we are being called by the

bridegroom to come into the hall for the celebration. Come to me. Choose me. I will never leave you or forsake you. Incline your hearts to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Come unto me, and I will give you rest.

The tears that I saw on the 4th, Images of joy, incredulity, and yes hope, from all over the world...I wondered if it made God jealous, all that outpouring of spontaneous devotion. Everyone invoking God's name, telling the stories of God's people....but not actually speaking *of* or *to*, Yahweh, the indomitably faithful.

Today Joshua calls to us. Choose this day, who holds your heart. May our lives, the truly noble efforts of our lives, may they be fueled and nourished by that precious communion.