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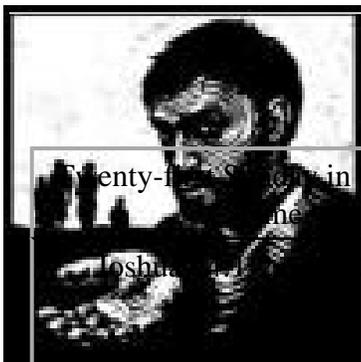
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Here and now

by Roger Karban

Spiritual Reflections

It's hard to put ourselves in the place of Joshua and his family in today's first reading. Most of us presume all religions basically deal with the same God. That God might go by the name of Yahweh, Allah, or the Lord, but we take for granted there's only one God with multiple names.



Twenty-first century in Ordinary

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Joshua 7: 18b

That wasn't the case until the prophet Deutero-Isaiah came along during Israel's sixth-century B.C.E. Babylonian Exile. Before then, people believed there were multiple, distinct gods. Ephesians 5:21-32

John 6:60-69

Living almost seven centuries before the Babylonian Exile, Joshua isn't faced with our simple choice of believing or not believing in God. He and his family must choose one God among the many gods they believe exist. What criteria do they employ?

?It was Yahweh, our God, who brought us and our ancestors up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery.? In other words: ?Yahweh? -- not these other gods -- gave us our freedom.?

I don?t know how many Christians today would employ Joshua?s criteria. Because we?re more interested in getting into heaven than in experiencing freedom right here and now, we simply trust that the one God we follow will squeeze us through the pearly gates, no matter how we live on this earth.

Marcus Borg tackled this misunderstanding in his book *Speaking Christian* (HarperOne, 1989). ?Salvation in the Bible,? he writes, ?is seldom about an afterlife ... even in the New Testament.?

The ancient Israelites looked at their laws differently than you or I do today. Most of us keep God?s (and the church?s) laws because it?s a way to get into heaven and avoid hell.

Most of the people who gave us the Hebrew Scriptures knew nothing of a heaven or hell. They kept the 613 Mosaic laws because, by doing so, they were assured a happy, fulfilled and free life right here and now. Contrary to their pagan neighbors, they didn?t have to learn from their own mistakes.

One can look at Peter?s reason in the Gospel for staying with Jesus from the same perspective as Joshua?s reason for staying with Yahweh. After many of Jesus? disciples have problems with this ?new way? of looking at his body and blood and ?no longer accompanied him,? he asked the Twelve, ?Do you also want to leave??

?Simon Peter answered, ?Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.??

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At first glance, it might seem that Peter was saying, ?If we keep your words, we?ll enter into eternal life after we die.? Except that John is the one evangelist who believes and teaches ?realized eschatology.?

Though we rarely hear this idea in homilies, it?s not very complicated. Eschatology refers to the ?last things? -- usually death, judgment, heaven and hell. If something?s realized, it?s already here; we don?t have to wait for the future to experience it.

John believes what we?re waiting for God (or Jesus) to accomplish in the future is already part of our lives right here and now.

Notice what Jesus says immediately before he puts Peter on the spot. ?The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.? If someone believes and carries out his words, that person already has life. He or she doesn?t have to die physically to achieve it.

Because of the strong Jewish insistence on achieving fulfillment during this life, Paul?s letters often zero in on ordinary human relationships. It?s in such everyday giving that Christian quality of life issues most come to the fore.

Consider today?s Ephesians pericope on marriage.

Following the biblical rule of thumb that the bigger the problem, the more verses are given to it, notice that the section on husbands loving their wives is three or four times longer than the part about wives loving their husbands. The problem in Ephesus was how men were treating their wives; not how women

were treating their husbands.

Our understanding of salvation has certainly evolved. Many Christians once thought they were doing their slaves a favor by keeping them enslaved. God made them subordinate for their own good.

Based on modern psychology, I don't know the Ephesian author's way of treating marriage would be very freeing for the wife.

Biblical salvation isn't written in stone. It's carved in the loving hearts of those determined to share in Yahweh and Jesus' concern for everyone.

We don't just receive salvation, but participate in bringing it about.

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