

Gideon destroyed an altar to a false god and ushered in a period of deliverance from evil. Throughout the Book of Judges, “the Israelites remain faithful to the Lord during the lifetime of the judge, but when the judge dies, they again abandon the LORD, and the cycle begins anew” (Note to Jgs 2:10-19).

When Gideon passed, the people again abandoned God. “The Israelites ... prostituted themselves by following the [false gods, the idols]. The Israelites did not remember the LORD, their God, who had delivered them from the power of their enemies all around them. Nor were they loyal to the house of ...Gideon for all the good he had done for Israel” (Jgs 8:33-35).

Gideon’s son Abimelech was one of many brothers eligible to succeed his father. Abimelech convinced the people of Shechem to support him in his lust for power. He had no interest in public service and he had no moral qualms of killing 70 brothers so he could be the undisputed ruler of Shechem (Hahn 9). In his thirst for power, there was only one brother he could not silence.

Jotham, the one surviving brother, was a man of faith who tried to warn the people of their poor choice in choosing an ungodly man. “Jotham climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim overlooking Shechem and proclaimed the parable of the trees choosing the bramble as their king (after the cedar, the fig, the olive, and the vine declined), with disaster as the result” (Hahn 481). In choosing Abimelech, the people abandoned God, and suffered the consequences. Shechem was destroyed three years after Abimelech’s ascent to power and he in turn was killed when a woman dropped a millstone from above.

We often make poor choices in life. Selfish choices lead to emptiness. And still, we thirst for the things that do not satisfy. The story of the woman at the well comes to mind. The Samaritan woman had made a series of poor choices throughout her life and was ostracized from the community. She approaches the well at an odd hour of the day when none of her neighbors will be there. Jesus asks her for a drink of water and confronts her with the truth about her life.

“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13-14). In Jesus, the woman finds what she had been searching for her whole life. She accepts the life-giving water and mercy of Jesus. Her life is transformed. She indeed is no longer thirsty for mere water. Saved by the healing power of Christ, she becomes a powerful witness drawing others to Christ. “Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?” (Jn 4:29).

Like the woman at the well, or the followers of Abimelech, we may make poor choices in life that do more harm than good. We need to choose to follow the Lord. The name Jotham translates to “the Lord is perfect” (Hahn 481).

When faced with a choice in life, we might ask ourselves who will benefit? A selfish choice may gain some temporary benefit, but it will not satisfy the soul that longs for God. If we make a choice that involves sacrifice with a motive of truly helping the less fortunate, we act like the landowner in today’s Gospel.

He hired people throughout the day. Those who worked a full day, got a full day’s wages. Those who worked fewer hours including those who were hired at the very end of the day were given the same wage. The owner saw the needs of the workers and responded unselfishly so that they could provide for their families. We too must seek to serve the Lord by making sacrifices for the good of others.