

February 16, 2014

Deuteronomy 30: 19-20

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Sermon: Choose Life

“L’Chaim”! The Hebrew word means “To Life”. In the musical, “Fiddler on the Roof”, The father of the bride, Tevye, toasts his daughter’s marriage. The situation has been tense between father and daughter, mostly because of her love choice, Lazar. Tradition has been broken. Change is difficult. However, at the wedding, the next generation stands before Tevye, ready to embrace their love and a new life. Tevye lifts up his glass and blesses them with Life singing:

*"Here's to our prosperity.
Our good health and happiness.
And most important,
"To life, to life, l'chaim".*

There is reconciliation in this scene, as a humble Tevye admits his imperfection, “Here's to the father I've tried to be”. Lazar joins in the toast and lifts up their common love, Tevye’s daughter and his bride to be. Both men understand the difficulties of life and sing a rather good reflection on our Deuteronomy passage.

*"Life has a way of confusing us, Blessing and bruising us"
God would like us to be joyful
Even when our hearts lie panting on the floor
How much more can we be joyful
When there's really something
To be joyful for
To life, to life, l'chaim (Fiddler on the Roof)*

Both of our scriptures today ask us to make choices so that you and future generations will be blessed. According to Deuteronomy 30:15-20, the choices are here before us: Life and Death, Prosperity and adversity, Blessing and curse, good and evil.

God’s choice is obvious – choose Life. But, what does that mean? How do you choose life? What daily tasks, menial or monumental do you consider blessings or curses?

Part of the Deuteronomic answer is to Keep God’s commandments, regulations and rules.

I don't know about you, but some choices are not all that black and white. Rules, traditions originally considered right have a way of changing. One theologian suggests that God's rules are not like the speed limit that may be posted as 55 mph one year and 65 the next. These are rules that change because of circumstances.

The principles, the greater commandments based on our covenant with God are like the laws of gravity. To be and do what God commands is to feel the pull of God's love. Gravity teaches that we should be able to stand firmly on the ground. The laws of gravity also gives us the wisdom to fly in smaller plane with a parachute.

What the Israelites learned in the Wilderness was to rely on God's ways of goodness. As they enter into the new territory, the promised land, they will be challenged by other societies, cultures, and religions. The warning in verses 17 and 18 is "if you have a change of heart, refuse to listen and worship other gods, you will die." Die spiritually, die as a people? The covenant between God and the individual will be broken. So, here is a clear statement about Free Will. First we are called by God into a covenant relationship, called to be God's people, to love God and Walk in God's ways and to keep God's commandments and be blessed.

The choice is ours. "Life and Death, Blessing and Curse". Even though we have Free Will, the advice is to choose the best portion God has to offer.

Choose life.
Love GOD, Listening obediently.
Embrace God and Life itself.

The shorten Gospel Lesson (Matthew 5:23-24) adds that we should reconcile with each other before we offer our gifts to God.

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

What comes to mind when we combine these two readings is the Greatest Commandment sited by Jesus: To Love God with all of your heart mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

So, what are some concrete ways to choose life instead of death, blessing instead of curse?

Rev. Brett Younger inspired me in the "Daily Feast" Devotions to make this list.

Turn off the television. (I'll add) Put down the chips and dip and walk around the block. Choose healthy foods and develop healthy habits. Eat to live rather than live to eat. Call up a friend. Invite someone you don't know well to lunch. Quit doing what is not worth your time. Do

something nice for another person in need. Stop arguing. Apologize to someone, even if she does not deserve it. Have patience...with others and with yourself.

Pray with a sincere and genuine heart. Love God. Believe that God loves you. Remember the stories and words of Jesus. Share God's love with someone who has forgotten it. See Christ in the people around you. Delight in God's good gifts. See that all life is holy and blessed.

Open your heart to the Spirit. Ask questions and live into the answers. Embrace the joyful, the hopeful and the holy moments. Let God make your life wonder-full.

Choose to see the good and the gracious. Choose to be honest and honorable. Choose to believe in God's forgiveness for yourself and others. Choose to be reconciled to each other and God.

For, God has set before us this day, life and death, blessing and curse, good and evil.

Choose Life so that you may live.

BENEDICTION

Go out into this day choosing to
Love God with your whole being.
Listen to God's voice
Follow God's commandments
Loving neighbor as well as yourselves
Make choices to live and celebrate Life.
And you **will be blessed.**