

“Choose”

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

It seems to me that there was a movie with one of the verses in today's Scripture featured in it. The verse, or at least part of it is: “God says, ‘I set before you life and death. Choose life.’”

The scene I am thinking of is a Bible, lying on the sand of a beach. The wind is blowing its pages, and gets to the page with that verse. The camera then focuses on it.

I have looked up the movie, which is what I thought was “On the Beach.” That show is about World War III, and the end of civilization because of nuclear war and radiation. However, there was no mention of the scene.

So, let's imagine for ourselves. God is speaking to the people, giving everyone an offer, a choice. “I set before you life and death.”

Then, God says, almost pleads with people, “Choose life.”

In the earlier verses, one choice was life and prosperity; the other was death and adversity.

Originally, these words were for the people of Israel, thousands of years ago. Once again, God was calling back the people who had strayed from God's ways.

It is wonderfully patient and loving of God; this happens quite a bit in the Old Testament.

For the people of Israel, the life which God offers means this: “Life is not the mere extension of days. It is loving, obeying, and cleaving to the Lord, instead of pursuing the ways of idolatry.” (Oxford Annotated Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

We need to remember that the Bible is more than a history lesson of what happened to those people, back then, and could never happen to us, in any way, shape, or form. Once in a while that is the case, but not for this one Scripture.

God offers us choices, too. God sets before us life and death. God intensely wants us to choose life. And yes, the life which God wants us to choose is the full, godly, faithful life. God wants us to choose the life which a Christian is meant to live, loving the Lord our God, obeying the Lord, and holding fast to the Lord.

Well, obviously, we are off to a good start; we are here, to worship God, in church. We are having worship and fellowship together. We are attentive to God and God's words. Our hearts are wide open for all this. We can even think of God as pouring wonderful, good life into us, in this way.

So, let's be diligent about coming to church on Sunday. We don't want to miss this great gift from God.

Of course, there is more to the week than Sunday. While we are not usually at worship during the rest of the week, we still have the time and opportunity to pray and read the Bible. We have the opportunity to put some goodness into the world as we live and deal with people.

But back to the idea of the choice. There is a funny thing about choices. There is an alternative choice, sometimes alternative choices. In this case, if we choose the other way, it would be horrible.

The other choice is death and adversity. As verse 17 puts it, that would be "if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them." These actions result in "death and adversity."

It may sound odd to think of civilized human beings in the year 2020 "bowing down to other gods and serving them." We are far too smart for such things, aren't we? We are not surrounded by the ancient pagan cultures with a carved statue god or goddess for this, that and the other, the way the people of Israel were, then.

Even so, we can turn away from God. We know that. We have seen that happen. We may even have had that experience ourselves, during a bad patch in our lives, or because of some circumstance.

And, as they say, nature abhors a vacuum. The soul hates a vacuum, void place, too. A soul without God doesn't stay empty. It latches onto something else. If that should happen, the "something else" (even if it starts out as something positive) can become idolatry, taking the place and the importance which only God should have.

Just the other week, I was at a confirmation class where the main topic was the season of Lent. The teacher had a really good way of describing the practice of

“giving up something for Lent.” She said that one way to look at it is that if there is something getting in the way of a person’s relationship to God, that thing would be a great thing to give up for Lent. (Mary Biesemeyer)

Now, is not Lent yet, there are a few more weeks, and what I am really trying to do is make the point that anything or anyone or any activity that is taking God’s place in our lives can constitute the worshiping of a false god, whether we call it that or not. That is idolatry, and it will always lead to trouble.

The other thing to remember here is that this is our choice to make. It is that free will thing, with which God has graciously given to us.

God does not force us to choose the Christian life. God does not force us to take Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Oh no, God does not work that way. We are free to make the choice. God does tell us what will happen either way.

We get life, prosperity, and blessings, if we choose God and God’s ways.

We get death, adversity, and curses, if we choose to turn away from God.

Again, while the choice is ours to make, God very much wants us to choose God.

Think of that movie, “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” (1989). Throughout the movie, people are trying to locate the Holy Grail, the cup which Jesus used during his Last Supper with the disciples, before his crucifixion. At the very end, one man is trying to pick out which cup, among several, is the true one. The Grail Knight in charge tells him, “But choose wisely, for while the true Grail will bring you life, the false Grail will take it from you.” The man picks a golden cup, and disintegrates, and vanishes.

The Grail Knight says, quite seriously and grimly, “He chose poorly.”

So, let’s all of us, choose wisely and well. Let’s choose life—life lived in the Christian faith, with all the blessings which God pours upon us. Amen.

Preached by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters, February 16, 2020.