

## CHOOSE LIFE

(Deuteronomy 30: 15-20)

- Intro: St. Louis County Jail had an alcohol and drug treatment program.
- To which people could be sentenced for offenses like:
    - #DUI (driving under the influence).
    - #Drug possession.
    - \*But not for selling.
  - Program was called "Choices."
    - #Bad choices had gotten these people into trouble with the law.
    - #Making better choices would help keep them out of trouble.

### I. People Of Israel Were Faced With A Choice.

#### A. They Were Encamped In The Land Of Moab.

1. Southeast of:
  - a. Dead Sea.
  - b. Land Of Canaan.
2. Near the end of their 40-year journey.
  - a. From slavery in Egypt.
  - b. To freedom in the promised land of Canaan.
3. Along the way they had stopped at Mount Sinai.
  - a. Where God had made a covenant with them.
    - Two-sided:
      - #Relationship.
      - #Agreement.
      - #Contract.
  - b. Where God had given them the 10 Commandments.
    - Israel's part of the bargain.

#### B. Moses Was Reminding Them Of Their Choices.

1. These are Moses "parting words" to them.
  - a. He's not going to be allowed to enter the Promised Land with them.
  - b. He had made a bad choice back in the desert.
    - Bit of road rage, if you will.
    - #Lack of water.
    - #Grumbling Israelites.
    - #Fit of temper.
    - Numbers 20: 1-13.

2. But first Moses has some "final words."
  - a. These are the third set of "final words" from Moses.
  - b. If you read 1 Chronicles.
    - David actually has ten "final words."
    - #Prior to his death.
3. Moses' final words reminded the Israelites that they have a choice.
  - a. Obedience.
    - Disobedience.
  - b. Blessings.
    - Curses.
  - c. Prosperity.
    - Adversity.
  - d. Life.
    - Death.
4. Moses would like to make the choice for them.
  - a. Choose life.
  - b. Deuteronomy 30:19.

## II. How Come That Is Such A Hard Choice?

### A. For Them And For Us.

1. It's not simply about personal preference.
  - a. When I was in Michigan on vacation.
    - I spent a morning in Holland, Michigan.
      - #There is a working 249 year-old windmill.
      - \*Imported from the Netherlands.
    - In one of the gift shops.
      - #There were some trivets with windmills that caught my eye.
      - \*Hand painted.
      - \*Imported from Holland.
    - #I narrowed my choices down to two.
      - \*When I had trouble deciding between the final two.
      - +I chose to buy them both.
      - \*My choices weren't between:
        - +Right.
        - +Wrong.
      - \*It was simply a matter of personal preference.
  - b. In choosing the Scripture readings for this morning.
    - At the 11:00 service.
    - #We usually use:
      - \*All three readings.
      - \*Psalm.

- At the 8:30 service.
  - #We usually use:
    - \*Gospel lesson.
  - #Sometimes.
    - \*One other lesson.
  - #Other times.
    - \*All three lessons.
- When Mary was putting together the bulletins.
  - #She asked me which readings I wanted for 8:30.
  - #Since I had a hard time deciding between:
    - \*Deuteronomy.
    - \*Philemon.
    - +I chose them both.
- Again it was not a matter of deciding between:
  - #Right.
  - #Wrong.
    - \*It was a matter of personal preference.

2. It's not simply a matter of deciding:
  - a. Life in this world is always good.
    - Physical death is always bad.
  - b. When I was a hospital chaplain.
    - I saw way too many instances.
      - #Where dying patients weren't allowed to die peacefully.
      - \*Medical interventions were imposed.
        - +Because the doctors could.
        - +Not because they should.
  - c. An inordinate amount of our health care dollars are spent.
    - On the last days and weeks of life.
      - #To what end?
        - \*To extend life?
          - +Few hours.
          - +Few days.
  - d. Several months ago.
    - My dad's PSA was extremely elevated.
      - #Sign he might have prostate cancer.
    - My dad's doctor referred him to a urologist.
      - #Who wanted to run all kinds of tests.
        - \*To determine if my dad does indeed have prostate cancer.
    - My dad is 94.
      - #God-willing, he'll be 95 in three weeks.

-I said:

# "Dad, what if you do have prostate cancer?"

# "Are you going to have surgery done?"

\*No.

# "Are you going to subject yourself to radiation treatment?"

\*No.

# "So why go through all of these tests?"

# "You're going to die from something."

# "What difference does it make?"

\* "If these tests conclude you have prostate cancer?"

-He told the urologist to take a hike.

e. These past three months.

-My dad has talked increasingly about wanting to die.

#He's tired.

#He's not coping well with life.

#He just wants to die and go home.

-When I was in Wisconsin last month.

#One of things I wanted to check on:

\*My dad has:

+Advance medical directives.

=He does.

+DNR (do not resuscitate) order.

=He does.

-For my dad.

#Choosing life.

\*Not about extending the quantity of life.

\*If there is not also a certain quality of life.

f. I did not watch the Emmy Awards last Sunday evening.

-I understand that Al Pacino won an Emmy.

#For his portrayal of Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

\*In the HBO movie:

+ *You Don't Know Jack*.

-While we may not:

#Approve of Kevorkian's methods.

#Condone so-called assisted suicide.

-We have a hard time escaping the fact.

#Choosing life.

\*Does not necessarily mean length of days upon this earth.

+At all costs.

B. So What Does It Mean To Choose Life?

1. Back to Moses and Deuteronomy.
  - a. It's about:
    - Covenant.
    - Relationship.
  - b. To choose life.
    - For the Israelites.
    - For us.
      - #To choose to live life in relationship with God.
      - \*Faithful.
      - \*Obedient.
2. That's where Philemon comes in.
  - a. Book of Philemon is only one chapter long.
    - Today's reading.
    - #21 out of 25 verses.
    - We read almost a whole book of the Bible.
    - #In about three minutes time.
  - b. Philemon had a slave.
    - Onesimus.
  - c. Onesimus apparently had run away.
    - Somehow connected with Paul.
    - #While Paul was in prison.
  - d. Paul:
    - Witnessed to Onesimus.
    - Helped to bring him to faith.
    - Now is sending him back to Philemon.
      - #Asking Philemon to take Onesimus back.
      - \*If Onesimus has stolen anything.
        - +Ham from the smoke house, perhaps?
      - \*Paul offers to make good the loss.
  - e. There is a pun here.
    - Name "Onesimus."
      - #Means "useful."
    - Before, Onesimus was useless.
      - #As a person.
      - #As a slave.
        - \*What good is a slave who keeps running away?
    - But now Onesimus has become useful.
      - #As more than an obedient slave.
      - #But as a brother in the faith.
  - f. Onesimus has chosen life.
    - In taking Onesimus back as a brother in the Lord.
    - #Philemon can choose life, too.

3. Choosing life is not always easy.
  - a. For:
    - Israelites.
    - Onesimus.
    - Philemon.
    - Us.
  - b. Our Sunday morning Bible class.
    - Has been leap-frogging through the Acts of the Apostles.
      - #Looking for nuggets from the first century church.
      - \*Might be useful for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
    - Last Sunday.
      - #We were in Acts 7.
        - \*Stoning of Stephen.
          - +First Christian martyr.
      - #We talked about one of the obstacles.
        - \*To sharing our faith.
          - +We like to be liked.
          - +We like to be popular.
          - +We don't want to offend anybody.
            - =Talking about religion.
        - \*So much of the time.
          - +We avoid the topic altogether.
          - +We water down our faith.
            - =So that it's not offensive to anyone.
      - #But is that the choice?
        - \*Of life.
        - \*Of death.
      - #I asked the class.
        - \*What it meant to be a disciple of Jesus.
          - +Class very quickly came up with answers:
            - =Believe.
            - =Follow Jesus.
          - +What nobody:
            - =Came up with.
            - =Wanted to come up with.
              - Discipleship is about:
                - #Taking up the cross.
                - #Following Jesus.
                - \*Luke 14: 27.
    - c. What seems counter intuitive to us.
      - Choosing life.
        - #This relationship with God.
          - \*Faith.
          - \*Obedience.

#Means dying.

\*Dying to:

+Self.

+Selfishness.

+Need to be popular.

\*Being willing to let go of life itself.

4. Isn't that precisely what Jesus has done?

a. Choosing life.

-Covenant relationship.

#Faith.

#Obedience.

b. By choosing death.

-Death on a cross.

#For:

\*Israelites.

\*Onesimus.

\*Philemon.

\*You.

\*Me.

c. There is that marvelous Christ hymn in Philippians 2.

-Though he (Jesus) was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,  
He humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

-Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

\*Philippians 2: 6-11.

Concl: On this Labor Day weekend.  
-We reflect on the gift of work.  
    #People who use their God-given gifts  
        \*Not only for their own good.  
        \*But for the good of others.  
        \*For the glory of God.  
-Please consider part of your vocation.  
    #Your calling from God.  
        \*To make choices.  
            +Good choices.

Let's start here.  
-At this table.  
-In bread and wine.  
    #Choose life.