

Pentecost 13 9/4/22
Deuteronomy 30:15-20 18C

TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT LESSON FROM DEUTERONOMY, THE 30TH CHAPTER

After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the people of God stood on the Plain of Moab itching to get into the Promised Land. But before they do, Moses had some last-minute words for them, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... choose life.”

And, you can just hear them scoff in their impatience, “Come On, Moses! Who in their right mind when given the choice between life and good and death and evil, would choose death and evil? Adam and Eve would. Israel would. You would. I would. In fact, we all would and we all have chosen death and evil.

Why do we do that? Moses lays out for us in our lesson what it means to choose life and good. It means obeying the commandments, loving the LORD your God, and walking in His ways. When you pause and think about it, that’s not so easy to do. God has given us 10 Commandments and they are not easy to keep. It is not easy to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Adam and Eve didn’t when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Cain didn’t when he killed his brother. Israel didn’t when she chose to worship the golden calf and all kinds of other gods. David didn’t when he chose to covet another’s man’s wife and commit adultery with Bathsheba.

It’s not easy to honor God’s name, especially when it’s so much easier to trust in lady luck and the lottery ticket. It’s not easy to gladly hear and learn God’s Word, especially when you want to watch TV and your children want to play their new Nintendo Switch. It’s not easy to love and

cherish your wife, especially when she's disappointed you and frustrated you so many times. And, by the way, you've disappointed and frustrated your wife many time as well. It's not easy to say something nice about your neighbor when gossip is so fun. And, the only way to get ahead is to see what you want, desire it with all your heart, and take it.

Why choose death and evil over life and good? Because it's so much easier to go your own way, to do what you want to do than to obey the commandments, loving the LORD your God, walking in His ways, and keeping His statutes and rules -- as you said that you would in your **Confirmation vows**. That's hard! That's a lot of work! And your flesh doesn't want to do at all.

And when you choose death and evil instead of life and good, Moses tells us what the consequences are: "But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish" (vv.17-18). Perish, as in die. Perish, as in go to hell for eternity, where "the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:48).

But, there is Good News for you, Dear Child of God. God made a choice, as well. When you chose death and evil over life and good, God chose life and good. So that you would not perish in death and hell, God "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son" (Jn 3:16).

Jesus came to live on your behalf. He lived as your substitute. When faced with life and good or death and evil, Jesus chose life and good. He was always obedient to God's commandments, always loved the LORD His God, always walked in His ways, always kept His statutes and rules.

No, it wasn't easy. The devil came to Him with temptation after temptation. The father of all lies spoke as sweetly to Jesus as he speaks to

you. The difference is that Jesus didn't fall for the devil's lies. He remained obedient to the Commandments, loved God, walked in His ways, and kept His statutes and rules and He did all for you. He did it so that His obedience, His loving, His walking, His rule-keeping would be yours. That means that when God looks at you, He sees Jesus, what Jesus did for you, in your place.

There's something else Jesus did for you. Jesus took the punishment you deserved for all the times you chose death and evil over life and good upon Himself. That punishment was death on a cross. Jesus hung on that cross clothed with your sin, your evil, your death. God condemned Jesus for your sins and Jesus died for you. And when He died, your sin, your evil, your death died with Him.

In the waters of your Baptism, you were not just baptized into His death, but also into His resurrection. God gave you all the forgiveness, goodness, and life that Jesus won for you on the cross. Your baptism tells you that you are God's chosen, a new creation in Christ and, as such, you choose life and good over death and evil.

Paul says it this way in the book of Romans,

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Ro 6:3-4).

Walking in newness of life means choosing life and good, living as who you are in Christ, keeping God's commandments.

As Paul urges his friend and brother in the faith, Philemon, to do. Our Epistle reading is from the book of Philemon. This Epistle is short, only 25

verses in all, but I think it is one of the most marvelous books of the New Testament.

Here's what happened. Onesimus was once enslaved in Philemon's household. He stole money and ran away to Rome. There, he met Paul. Earlier in Paul's missionary journey, he had met Philemon, brought him to faith in Jesus, and Philemon became a leader of the church. Paul told Onesimus about Jesus, and he too, became a believer.

Now, Paul writes to Philemon to welcome Onesimus as his brother in Christ and set him free. We cannot even comprehend how incredible this would be in the ancient world. A Master not exacting revenge on a slave who stole and ran away, but former master and slave becoming brothers in Christ, forgiving one another, and treating one another in love. In time, Onesimus became a bishop in the early church.

Onesimus and Philemon lived as who they were in Christ. In our Gospel, our Lord Christ says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Mt 14:27). No, that is not an easy thing to do. We do not like the cross. We like to live for ourselves. Yes, we daily make a mess of things. We all daily sin much. When we do, what do we do? Be who you are in Christ. Live the life of the baptized. Return to the waters of your baptism to take the Old Adam, which is always trying to drag us into death and evil, and hold his head under the water to drown him by contrition and repentance. And then, watch as the new creation we are in Christ arises and lives before God in innocence, righteousness, and blessed forever.

Remember and be comforted, Dear Child of God, you are clothed in Jesus. God looks at what you and does not see what you've done or what you've failed to do, God sees only what Jesus has done for you. The

righteousness of Christ covers you, that even when you sin, when you choose death and evil, God forgives you and strengthens you through the hearing and learning of His Word and the eating and drinking of Christ's very Body and Blood **to live who you are in Christ.**

Which is why we pray in our collect for this Sunday, "Grant us courage and strength to take up the cross and follow Him." Today, life and good, death and evil are set before us. God says, "Choose life." Live as who you are in Christ.