**Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (ESV)**

**15** “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. **16** If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **17** But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, **18**  I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. **19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, **20** loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

**“Chosen For Life”**

 To all those who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:7). Amen. It had been a long haul but they made it. After wandering in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years, Israel now had something new to see. They were standing on the plains of Moab right outside the Promised Land. The excitement must have been overwhelming to those that only knew a life of wandering. By this time, Moses was old and his life spent. He had lead God’s people out of captivity from Egypt. He watched the same generation grumble against God and die in the wilderness. Lest the new generation overlook what God gave their fathers was also for them. Moses renewed the covenant Law that originally came from Mt. Sinai.

 As we come together for the last of our summer joint services. Let us pause to look at the landscape set before us. Indeed, it was a choice to form this relationship of a dual parish. For some it is an answer to dwindling numbers in rural America. For others it is an answer for better ministry of the Gospel as we work together. A few might even regard it as an answer they would have never chosen. Whatever the case, if everything is about the choice, if that is the center of attention, we miss the more important fact. Whether one, two, a hundred or thousands it is and will always be the Lord’s Church. As God carried His people through the wilderness, so the Word of Christ keeps us safe as His baptized. Making decisions in life rests not on what, but Who has decided to save us.

 Long before the covenant Law, God looked with grace upon those He chose. Captivity in Egypt meant Israel really had no options to choose. They were slaves to Pharaoh, period, end of story. Yet, when God gave deliverance by the hand of Moses, these freed slaves chose to build a golden calf at Mount Sinai. God knows how to pick them. He called them A “stiff-necked” people. Life did not come from their choosing, but from how God chose them. He said, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

 Life is bigger than our choices because God already chose you. Life was here before we even began to choose and life is far more than our choices. God already made His decision by the Gospel because a sinful world has no say. The gift of Jesus is something none would choose, but God chose to give us. As the Apostle Peter declares, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9). Where sinners could never make enough choices to correct sin, God made just one choice and it changed everything. St. Paul tells us, “…He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will…” (Ephesians 1:5). Baptism is where this promise of deliverance in Jesus is now to fall upon every person. It is from the same waters of life, where our choices find meaning from the One who out of His love chose us.

 As much as the next generation was looking upon the Promised Land a place different from their fathers. God said, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.” Just because the scenery was going to change, the Law remained. Whether in the wilderness or in this new land of Canaan, their choices were a matter of life and death. It was more than doing the right kind of work, but to whom they would turn to for praise, comfort and forgiveness. False gods were always the default option for salvation by works, while God used the Law to drive His people to Him. As Luther put it, “Therefore Moses speaks thus in order to humble and frighten them, in the hope that there may be some who understand that it is not in their power to keep the Law, and who in humility seek grace from God. This is what spiritual men do, but not presumptuous hypocrites.”[[1]](#footnote-1) God’s Word softens the heart of sinners to hear Him and not phony comforts that deny faith in Him.

 The false gods chosen for comfort even today only bring death. It is more than choosing good versus evil or the law rather than lawlessness. Everything rests on the 1st commandment. Whatever you fear, love, and trust this is your god. In a land with so much innovation and productivity, we have created many gods. You can turn to them for pleasure, pain, justice, and safety. Abortion is the biggest sign of this death covering up sexual immortality and making family plans a choice of convenience. Pornography brings another deathblow of selfishness over a true relationship of service chosen in the bond of marriage. Greed for gain is also the same old demise of placing success and money over God. All of these and more have become a sales pitch, a political slogan, and finally a false god. All have the same result. God says “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.” We can feel we make more right choices than wrong, but it misses why God does the choosing. Jesus knows the Law is a curse and false gods a sham. He calls all to repent and follow Him in faith saying, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

 Moses made it clear how they survived the wilderness and what was going to keep them safe with Joshua leading them into the Promised Land. The covenant of God’s grace is what paved the way. It came with the confidence of God saying, “Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days…” As the Baptized people of God, we can always approach the Father by holding up the hope we have in Jesus. We confess our sinfulness saying, “For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of Your holy Name.” The Word of forgiveness is a fact carved in the sacrifice of Christ once for all. St. Paul states, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). He fulfilled the Law choosing what was pleasing to God and what was good for man. Likewise, since all false gods bring death, Jesus suffered on the cross so none can miss the grace God gives in Him.

 Christ chose to face death for you now the choice is life in His Name. This means choosing life in view of the cross and not of my own creation. The savior keeps His promise but looks for those who fear, love and trust Him saying, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” It is a narrow way, just like there is only one God who gives life while many gods lead to death. Jesus stands between God and us with His sacrifice as promised in baptism and given in the Sacrament. He is our Joshua better than Moses and the Law leading us into the true Promise Land of His risen victory for sinners. In the same way, choosing life in His Name means He stands between all our interactions with others be it family, friends, strangers, or enemies. It means speaking truth in love to those choosing to stand against life. It means forgiving those whose choices caused harm to their bodies and that of others. It means helping the victims who suffer loss from the choices made by others. It means praying for our country and its leaders to choose good laws despite selfish gain or loss of popularity polls. It means finally for us all to choose life, which comes from Christ, hides in the cross, and is upheld in confidence by God’s Word. Making decisions in life rests not on what, but Who has decided to save us. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. *Luther's Works, Vol. 9 : Lectures on Deuteronomy*. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, 9:269 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)