

Choose Life  
July 25, 2021  
Maple Grove UMC  
Rev. Patricia Wagner

Deuteronomy 30: 11-14, 19

*11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. 19 I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, that both you and your seed may live*

It was wintertime, just after Christmas, and I was driving on the beltway outside of Chicago traveling east on Friday evening rush hour when a car sideswiped me, dislocated my driver's seat and set my Celica spinning out. All I remember was seeing the car lights coming toward me and wondering if it would hurt when I died.

But when the spinning stopped, I found myself stalled, facing the right direction, with a truck on my right, also stopped, protectively giving me time to pull over.

I was alive the car was drivable. How was that possible?

What had everyone had to do to get out of my way? And why I had been spared when so many good people die this way? And all I could think was, that whatever the reason I have survived, I should make sure to do something with my life. But what?

I was traveling to see a wise friend, a priest, about a decision to go for my divinity degree and PhD or to go back overseas. Both meaningful, one seemed to be the upward and steady path, and the other the downward and uncertain.

I saw the priest, who told me to listen to God. So, after getting the car fixed, I found my way to Niagara Falls. I donned the rain jacket, then took the elevator deep down to the tunnel underneath the falls. You can sense the ancient power of the earth there, 1/5 of the world's freshwater crashes down over those rocks, but there was something welcoming, too. I sensed that I was part of this, that we human beings are part of this power.

I walked down the portal, and there with water rushing in I heard clearly the answer to my question, seemingly spoken aloud: *Go with what gives life!*

Moses is nearing the end of his life and journey and is desperate for the people he's been leading to know what he knows. It takes 26 chapters of Deuteronomy to tell them.

He reminds them of all they have been through the ways in which their lives have been upended, shaken, shaped. He has described what God intended for them; to love God, heart soul and mind, in *chapter 6* to cancel the debts of the poor, in *chapter 15*, to guard against excess wealth, 16 limit punishment to protect human dignity, 19 offer hospitality to runaway slaves, 23 pay employees fairly, 24 leave part of the harvest for those who need it.

Then concludes: *11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. 19 I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, that both you and your seed, your children, may live.*

*It's your choice, the Lord says, it was the choice of those in the first garden, it's your choice now.*

The Creator of heaven and earth chose to reach out to us; to reveal Godself to us through a child whom we would love.

And Mary chose to bear that child and Joseph chose to claim that child. and then, Jesus, in turn, chose in the wilderness not to take the easy path but to follow his calling, then he chose his disciples, chose us.

And then, perhaps first by our parents, but then somewhere along the way, we chose this path for ourselves.

In story and questions and by his own life, Jesus shows us the choices before us: *What brings forth life in the kingdom of God in you?* Choose that life, he says.

Choose to speak when it's easier to stay silent, to love when it's easier to hate, to care when it's easier to turn away, to give when it's easier to keep, to forgive when it's easier to resent.

As Jesus showed us, it isn't the easy life we choose, when we choose his way, it isn't the longest life but unlike serving the small gods, when we listen to **that voice**, we claim our **true** life.

Over and over, throughout our days, the voice quiet or rumbling, clear or hazy, says, *I am here, and the choice is yours, once again. Life or death? Choose life.*

I ended up choosing a rather downward path with profound consequences and wondered often about that other way. And yet, in that moment of the rushing waters the command and the path was clear.

Its not easy being our true selves, choosing to fully live into the life that is within us.

I recently heard someone talking about the Song “*It's Not Easy Being Green.*” It was an odd lyric to me. I never really connected with it. But as Sesame Street marked its 50th anniversary this summer, I heard a woman recalling hearing that song for the first time.

She gasped. “*Do you hear that?*” she said, to her friend. They were singing about her, about them, about her living her life in brown skin.

And its about living in yours and choosing again and again to claim the life God has given you. Think of that as Steve sings, and think of this: *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, that you may live.*

Amen