

“He Is Your Life”

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 (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

Transitions are tough. I was reminded of this last week as I spoke with crestfallen parents who had just taken their daughter to college for the first time, and then to an older member who had recently decided to move from their home into a retirement community, and then later, to a widow struggling to adjust to an empty seat at the dinner table. The truth is, whether it's beginning a new school year or starting a new job, moving to a different house or welcoming a new baby into the family, transitions always mean change and, for all of us, change is terribly hard.

In today's reading from Deuteronomy, we witness one of the most daunting transitions in the Bible. This section of Scripture, which actually begins back in chapter 29, features some of the last words Moses spoke to the Children of Israel. As you may remember, Moses had disobeyed God's instructions in the wilderness and, as a punishment, God told Moses he would not enter the land God had given on oath to His people. Now, as they stood on the edge of the Promised Land, they looked out into an unknown country filled with enemies, and Moses was not going with them. The man God had used to lead His people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea on dry ground; the man through whom God had provided His Law at Sinai and fed His people with manna as they wandered in the wilderness; the man who had spoken for God and by whose hand the people had been sustained for forty years; the life of their leader had come to its end and the people were about to make a huge transition without him.

This is the setting for today's Old Testament reading, and as they stood together on the plains of Moab, this was Moses's last chance to equip God's people for the monumental changes that awaited them just over the horizon, and, as they prepared to end their wilderness wandering, his words were anything but ambiguous. Moses said, “I set before you today life and good, death and evil... 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, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him” (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20).

In this pivotal moment, as God's people were poised to enter a land that was the culmination of a forty-year journey, Moses confronted them with simple and distinct choices: Good or evil! Blessings or curses! Life or death! As we hear the bold and stark options Moses laid out in his farewell speech, the choice seems more than obvious, and yet Moses knew these people. He had seen their parents die for their sin and, as he watched this generation come of age in the wilderness, he had heard their complaints, he had judged their disputes, he had thrown up his hands in frustration at their disobedience, and he had provided intercession for them, begging for God's mercy. He knew these people, and he knew the inevitable sin that lay ahead of them, and yet, passionately and purposefully in this final address, he pleads with them to choose life so that they and their children may live.

Now, it's very easy to hear these words as conditional statements about God's favor. After all, Moses essentially tells them, “If you choose wisely and do what's right, then God will bless you with good things.” The language from this reading can certainly be heard this way, but that would be a gross misreading of this passage. Earlier, I mentioned that this address to the people started back in chapter 29, and it's very important to note that before he gets to the bold language of choice in today's text, Moses looks back, and he tells them their story! He reminds them how God had chosen them to be His people. He recalls the dramatic deliverance from Egypt. He shows them how God had provided for them in the

wilderness, where their shoes had not worn out and their stomachs had remained full, and through this story of deliverance, protection, and provision, Moses revisits and renews God's covenant.

Today, as we consider the meaning of this story in our own lives, we need to see the parallels between their story and our story, because, my friends, their story *is* our story! We need to be reminded that despite our weakness and in light of our rebellion, and in the wilderness of our disobedience and unbelief... God has come to us, and He has chosen us! He has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light! He has spoken to us by His Word! He has washed us in the waters of Baptism! He has fed us with His Body and strengthened us with His Blood! And He has promised us a home! In Christ, *that* is our salvation story, and the story of salvation through Jesus Christ is what this day is all about!

Today, we celebrate and underscore the importance of Christian education at every level, and as we hold up this ministry to which we have been called as parents and pastors and teachers and students, these words of God are for us! Today, God sets before us good and evil, blessings and curses, life and death – and the stakes couldn't be higher. We are dealing with ultimate and eternal things, and yet these choices all hinge on what God has already done. The story of our life, and the reality of our eternal future, is *in every way* tied to the story of salvation that God has worked out for us in the death and resurrection of His Son. In the cross of Christ, God's wrath was satisfied, our punishment was delivered, and the death, destruction, and curses that we deserve were fully met in Him. And it is this path walked for us by Christ that has opened the door of prosperity and blessing and of a life that will never end. And that is why Moses's words matter today!

Like the children of Israel, we are facing a future that is full of transition. For some of you, these transitions will be traumatic. And, for all of us, the reality of change brings with it the temptation to walk our own way, and without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will always choose our own way. But the story of God's action in our lives sustains us, and the Spirit of God strengthens us, and in the midst of life's transitions, and in the face of our fear and weakness, God is always there to meet our sinful disobedience with forgiveness and life and salvation.

In a very real sense, the radical words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy are echoed by Jesus in our Gospel reading when he says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). You see, when two paths diverge, the difference initially seems insignificant, but the farther you walk down the path, the greater the difference becomes. The words of Moses and of Jesus in today's readings dispel any illusion that we can walk two paths. And their bold and shocking call to repentance is meant to remind us that only in the Lord is there life.

My friends, you have been chosen and delivered and protected, and the Promised Land is a reality that in Christ you will see, and so today God says to you, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. 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." By God's grace, and because of God's choice, this is your story, and today, this life in the Lord is yours! Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God's people say, "Amen!"

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