

The Healthy Choice

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 & Matthew 5:21-26

Rev. James Ramsey, February 16, 2014

Choices. We have so many choices.



What will we eat? Where will we spend our money? What will we do with our time? How will we pursue happiness?

Moses has led the wandering Israelites to the brink of the Promised Land, God's chosen leader at the helm of God's own people. They stand at the shore of the Jordan River.

Moses knew they dare not rush headlong into the land, a land by all accounts "flowing with milk and honey." They had a choice to make, there were alternatives before them: "life or death" -- "prosperity or adversity."



This is a defining moment. These people brought from Pharaoh's slave yards remain in peril, only now they stand with a different perspective. Unlike when Pharaoh held their life and death in his hands and chose according to his whims, the Israelites now hold their own lives in their own hands. The choice is theirs.

Moses makes clear what is required for the healthy choice. They are to love God, walk in God's ways and observe God's commandments.

"LOVE" in the Bible, and especially in Deuteronomy, "is always a verb, an action, never simply an inner emotion." So Moses' command that the Israelites love God is much more than an attitude they should show - it is rather a call to action. God's love in action delivered the Hebrews from Egypt. Israel's love for God is also to be active - to be demonstrated through their obedience to God's commandments.

Yet, should they choose against love...should they mock life... there are consequences. Consequences for Israel of old...but also consequences even for us, God's people of today.

Moses singles out one sin, idolatry. The result of bowing down to other gods – whether they be the ancient fertility gods, the ba'als, or our modern idols of material goods, security through isolation, or technological gadgetry – the result is an existence that lacks joy, well-being, security and abundance. It is adversity governed by deathliness.



Looking toward the promised land, Moses implores his people to act as God would have them. "Choose life," he thunders. "Choose prosperity, choose God."

They had chosen God, and followed God's leader for 40 years in the wilderness. It would seem they had already made the choice Moses advocated. Yet it's a choice that must be remembered, renewed, reiterated.

The U.S. Postal Service delivered a computerized notice to The Assembly of God Church in Bushnell, Florida. The notice came from American Family Publishers. The familiar letter announced that God, of Bushnell, Florida, had been chosen as a finalist for the \$11 million top prize in the Publishers' Clearing House Sweepstakes. The letter was personalized and read, as those letters always read:



Dear God, we've been searching for you! What an incredible fortune this would be for you, God! Could you imagine the looks you'd get from your neighbors! But don't just sit there, God...

It was, obviously, a computer error. But there's a deeper error here than just a computer typing God's

name into a form letter. Biblically, the story of human history is not the story of our search for God, but of God's search for us...not us choosing God, but God choosing us! That's why Jesus, gathered around the Last Supper table, told the disciples, You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

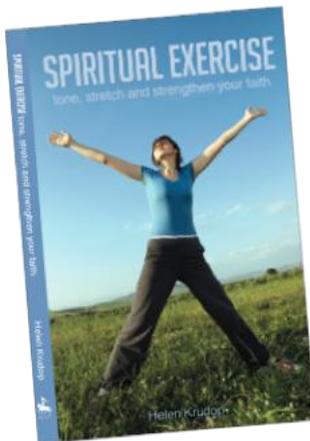
God has chosen us, but we are invited, again and again, to ourselves choose God. So Joshua could say to God's people: Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

This week in my daily devotions I read this text from the Prophet Isaiah:

Those who trust in the LORD for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak. (Isaiah 40:31)



It's a good way to begin the day...to choose again to trust God...to bank on the fact that God is renewing, lifting, sustaining. This is the healthy choice. We could always choose to "go it alone." We could choose to be gloomy, pessimistic, suspicious, wary...but our spirits are healthier when we choose to go with God!



God said through Moses: *I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days...*

The Healthy Choice for us today is still to choose God – to choose his Son, Jesus – to accept him as Lord and Savior – and to claim the abundant life available only through him.

That is the biggest choice, the first choice, but then there are a whole lot of choices that follow. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples to choose against the path of anger, to refrain from insulting one who has

wronged you, to choose love instead of hate. Further, Jesus lobbies for the choice of reconciliation -- it is so important, in fact, that Jesus counsels that you should reconcile with your neighbor before the Sunday offering is taken up!



Christian author Philip Gulley offers this...
Now I want to tell you a lie: Hate is an emotion we can't help. Hate is a feeling we cannot overcome. If we hate someone, it is because we just can't help ourselves. We're human. We have no choice but to hate. That is a lie. Unfortunately, it is a lie many people believe. They believe this lie in order to excuse their

hatred. After all, if we can't help but hate, if hate is a feeling we simply cannot help, then hatred is never our fault, is it?

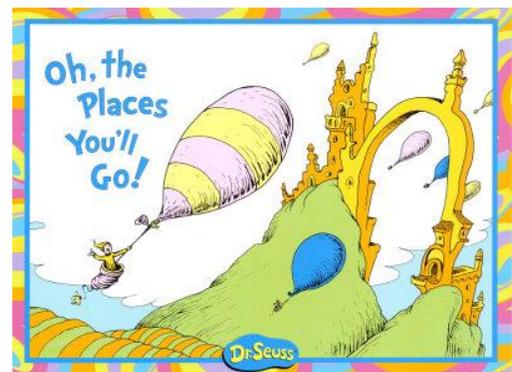
But we can help it. Hatred is a choice. We choose to hate, just as we choose to love. Oh, I know, there are people out there who believe love isn't a choice, that love is primarily an emotion, a feeling, a stirring in the loins. These are misguided people -- These are the people who love the idea of love but seem unable to stay in it. Love is a matter of the will - something we decide to do. Love is a choice.

The Healthy Choice is not always the easiest choice, it's not always the feel-good choice, it's not often the popular choice. But it is the only choice that leads to abundant life.

I remember the rousing advice of Dr. Seuss, in his book: **Oh, the Places You'll Go** (New York: Random House, 1997)

You have brains in your head.
 You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
 any direction you choose.

You're on your own.
 And you know what you know.
And YOU are the guy
 who'll decide where to go.





So make the Healthy Choice...
Choose the way of God, the way of love.
Choose Jesus – choose life!