

Choices

The Book of Deuteronomy is often called Moses' "farewell address." The 40 years of exodus in the desert is about to end. The promised land of Canaan awaits. Moses can see the rich valley that lies in the distance from the mountain where he addresses his people. He reminds them of God's deliverance; how they were slaves in Egypt until God led them to freedom; and how God has sustained them during their long exodus journey.

As they come into this new land, as they find this identity as God's chosen people, they will have choices. This freedom to choose comes from a loving God. God gives choices. Choose to obey the commandments; choose to love God; choose life.

But Israel made poor choices. This is the record of the Old Testament, especially in 1,2 Samuel and 1,2 Kings. They chose to trust in kings rather than God. They chose foreign alliances rather than faithful obedience. They chose to remake the law into a series of regulations, rather than know God's love, and build their relations upon love rather than law. They chose not to listen or to follow the many prophets God sent them.

So, what does God do for his people after centuries of poor choices? He sends Jesus. God gives his son. God so loved the world that he gives his only son ... to try to help us to make good, wise, faithful choices. Of course, we know how that works out for Jesus. It ends or maybe it starts with Jesus' choice of the cross. What choices do we make because Jesus chose the cross?

We have one more Sunday to consider Jesus' most concentrated teaching – The Sermon on the Mount – in Matthew's Gospel. As Moses did in Deuteronomy, so Jesus does in his sermon. He encourages us to make good choices in everyday life.

Today we hear about several subjects we know quite well. First – Anger. Jesus asks us to consider what we do with our anger. Can we use it to find forgiveness and work for reconciliation? Or will anger lead us into the darkness of sin and despair?

We also hear Jesus teaching about lust – sexual desire – how will we live in our relationships with others. Can there be responsible sharing and understanding? Or will self-centeredness and even abuse prevail?

This section of chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount ends with a hope that we will live in integrity and truthfulness. Can we speak the truth? Do we choose the truth? Or are we comfortable with half-truths, lies, falsehoods? In John's Gospel, we hear Jesus say "the truth will make you free..." Will we always choose truth?

The gift of God's grace brings freedom. We are given this incredible gift – the gift of choices. How shall we live? How do our actions and thoughts lead us to health, to a right relationship with one another, with God? An old saying from the 1960s reminds us that we are "either part of the problem, or part of the solution..." Let's try to make the right choices; choose God; be part the solution.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Matthew 5:21-37