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Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 14:25-33

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose *life*... (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Have you ever disregarded the advice of someone who loved you? Imagine an elderly person who is dear to you: a grandfather, a grandmother, a dear old pastor. He walks with a cane. His remaining hair is white. Her arm is crippled with arthritis, but her eyes are clear and her heart is warm. Imagine her last words to you.. his last words to you. Did you heed them? This morning we get another chance to hear the final words of a very fine old man. I mean Moses.

In the very next passage just beyond this morning's Bible Lesson from the Thirtieth Chapter of Deuteronomy, we learn that Moses is an old man, near the end of his time. How old? One hundred and twenty years:

<sup>1</sup>And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel. <sup>2</sup>And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.(Deut 31:1-2, KJV)

If we have disregarded fine old men and fine old women in the past, let us not do so this time. At the end of a long sermon, thirty chapters long, Moses pours out his heart to the people with a final appeal that they should choose life. He has led them, he has loved them for a long, long time. He is one hundred and twenty years old and he will not live to be one hundred and twenty-one. His words are urgent. They are carried along by the urgency of love:

<sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose *life*...

Notice that the words of Moses are very simple. He says, choose life. He does not say, “*Consider* choosing life. *Try* choosing life. If not now, then *someday* choose life.” No, time's a wastin'. The years are slipping by. Grey hairs are setting in. Choose life, now!

Imagine Moses speaking confidentially to individual Israelites. “Now, Elam, you know you have a spot on your lung. It is high time for you to stop smoking. You smoke like a chimney. But you are about to cross this Jordan River. You are about to enter the Promised Land. Do not go smoking into that Land. Do not go smoking into the future. Choose life, my dear man. I cannot go with you. I am too old. So heed my final words and choose life.

“And Peleg, your case is bad too. Why, you have a spot on your liver! Stop drinking! By what authority do you continue to drink? Your body is holy. It belongs to God. If you do not stop drinking, you shall be breaking the Fifth Commandment — the Commandment against murder. Murder of yourself! You know that our Lord loves life, and so obey the Commandment. Abandon your bottle!

“And you, young Reu, Mr. Wasteful. You are so smart, so gifted. But you are squandering your talents and opportunities. You are breaking my heart and the heart of your parents. The Seventh Commandment says, “Thou shalt not

steal,” and this includes stealing from yourself, from your family, from your land, from your employer. Obey the Commandments, for there is life with them.

“And Eliphaz, we are alone now — just you and me. Our conversation is confidential. Son, you must get your lust under control. You must learn to hold marriage in high regard, else what trouble you will bring to yourself and to our world. What a diminishing of life in our town! What suffering for the children! The Sixth Commandment asks you to seek purity in your thoughts, words, and deeds. Do so, Son. Choose life.”

And in general, old man Moses gives his testimony:

<sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life... (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Do you see that such counsel is not harsh or bitter? For what else can Moses say when he loves his people? How can love sanction the suffering caused by sin? How can love consent to death?

At first blush, there is an unrelenting, uncompromising tone to today’s Bible readings. And so, Moses sets before us “life and death, blessing and curse.”

And today’s Psalm - Psalm One - speaks of the two paths — entirely urging the one and entirely rejecting the other:

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. <sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. <sup>3</sup>And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth

shall prosper. <sup>4</sup>The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

And then, in our Gospel Lesson, Jesus calls the disciple to surrender everything to him:

So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

Sometimes, the choice lying before us is for one or the other, but not both. Sometimes we cannot have our cake and eat it too. For all the world it looks to me as if the choices set before us today in our Bible readings are those kind of choices. “Choose life,” says Moses. “Do not choose some middlin’ mixture of life and death, but choose life!” What else can Moses, David, and Jesus say to us? Love compels them to say, Choose life!

And now, here you and I stand, as if on tiptoe on top of Mt. Pisgah, gazing across the Jordan River, gazing toward the Promised Land. It is indeed a land of promise, for Jesus is risen. It is indeed a future of promise, for Jesus is risen. Easter means that life is available to us. It is there for the taking. So choose life. Choose the Commandments of God. Choose to walk with Jesus.

Once upon a time, a young man came to Jesus and asked about eternal life. And Jesus loved that young man, but in the end, that young one turned and walked away sorrowful:

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. <sup>22</sup>But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful : for he had great possessions. (Matthew 19:21-22, KJV)

He went away sorrowful, but he went away. He exercised his freedom in that mad way. He exercised his freedom to walk away from Jesus, and in so walking, he diminished his life.

How many more chances will we have? Do any of us know for sure? Perhaps we think we can set aside the divine appeals reaching out to us for now, meaning to pay attention next time. But who knows how many next times we will have? And who knows whether by delaying, we are not coarsening ourselves, and make it harder and harder to attend to the words that are meant for our flourishing and the increase of life?

Today's Bible readings extend to you and me the same appeal that is spoken generation after generation to the people of God: choose life! Cling to God. Obey his commandments. Find abundant life with him. Do not serve other gods, such as money or fashion or popularity. Instead, walk with God, and in so walking, find life, through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.