

Precious Jesus, help us all hear what you are saying to us. Amen!

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!...or not.

Choices, choices, choices! How many do we make consciously and unconsciously every day? Are they good or not so good choices. Sometimes our choices are spontaneous and thoughtless - like eating yet another cookie! How about hitting the gas at a yellow stoplight? Then, if someone hits their horn you're upset! Both may be inappropriate. Both can have consequences. What is your attitude? Sometimes our choices are prayerfully considered and deliberate. Choices can bring us closer to God - -- or further away. Oh, God never moves away from us – EVER! But, we stray slowly, step by tiny step --- or quickly in rebellious or self-indulgent leaps.

In college I learned some things! 1) We can control our thoughts; 2) our thoughts control our emotions; 3) therefore, (Liturgist/Jyl reads slide) we can control our emotions – by our thoughts.

God made each of us as we are but He gives us wonderful, unending choices with how to use this life He's given us. Remember the truth that God is the Potter and we are the clay? He creates and molds us but gives us freedom of choice and attitude.

Often, I need to redirect myself with a deliberate thought and attitude adjustment.

I love Paul's reminder:

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(Scripture slide 1 Philippiian's 4:4-8)

“REJOICE in the Lord ALWAYS; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

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(Scripture slide 2: Thessalonians paraphrase and Romans 8:28)

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“Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:6-  
18 paraphrase

“we know that all things work together for good for those who love God who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

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Merlin Carothers is the author of “Power in Praise” among other books. His main premise is to thank God for everything. Carothers’ paraphrase of 1 Thessalonians 5:6-

18 is very concise: "Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

He continues with Romans 8:28: "we know that all things work together for good for those who love God who are called according to his purpose." Carrothers says, "Praising God in all things, we "soon experience the result of an attitude of consistent thanksgiving and joy; and in turn, faith is strengthened and we can continue to live this way." (pg 2-3) We can live in the peace and joy that come only from God – regardless of circumstances. How? By our choice of attitude.

Just imagine! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could each and all of us leave things in God's hands. I try sometimes and it's true! Other times I "help" God or try to direct Him. Choices help us remain closer or further from God. The choice is up to us. But, how do we know what He wants of us?

I would really like to say I keep my eyes upon Jesus all the time, but that isn't so. Driving in the parking lot when people do what I consider thoughtless, dangerous, or dumb, I tend to loudly tell them so! At that moment, what are my choices and attitudes? Being guided by the old mantra "What would Jesus do" comes to mind as a better choice.

Here is another time for choices. The tv news is reporting something political I don't agree with. In my great wisdom, I stand up and approach the tv and in loud, decisive volume I state my judgmental assessment! There is a time, place and

way to productively express our opinions. Do our choices and attitudes bring us closer to God or further away? How do we know what God desires? We can control our choices and attitudes by listening to God.

We all have ideas. We accept but abuse the free will he gives us. He gives us free will and we decide to follow Him...or not. We also can pray, read the Bible, talk with other believers, listen...Our Creator God shows Himself in music, in people, in the beauty of nature, in all creation. The closer we are to Him the better and simpler our choices in life.

Listen to Elijah's experience searching for God.

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(Scripture slide 3: 1 Kings 19:9-13 read by liturgist/Jyl)

1 Kings 19:9-13: "Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'what are you doing here, Elijah? He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant,                      thrown down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by'. Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and

after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence."

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The Lord spoke to Elijah in the silence which is one of the ways He speaks to us. God chooses to speak to you and to me in silence or whispers because he is always so close to us that whispers are all He needs.

Of all my favorite Scripture verses some of my MOST favorite concern listening to God in silence, stillness, peace:

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(Scripture slide 4: Ps 46:10, etc.)

"Be still and know that I am God"(Ps 46:10)

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." (Ps 37:7)

"Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give to you not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:26-7)

In Exodus 14:14 as the Israelites were departing Egypt, Moses told them: "The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still" and then God parted the Red Sea!

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You probably see the common theme of these verses. God has been telling me for years to Stop and listen to Him! Peace, be still and attentive. How does God call to you? How does He get your attention? He never goes away, it's only we that stray. Like Jesus reminds us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, God, our Father, is always waiting for us with arms wide open. Our decisions have consequences that help us learn. God is always loving and accepting us regardless of our choices. How do we love God?

We love God in a myriad of ways...and God loves them all. We listen! We thank Him for never-ending blessings through prayer and action. We praise, implore, confront and question, we obey. We use the gifts he gave us – for Him and in His name. We share Him with others - joyfully!

(PAUSE) Through our tithes and offerings we also show Him our love. USHERS will you assist us?

Doxology

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Our Father, all that we are and all that we have come as blessings from you. Accept these gifts back to you and use them to spread your word and blessings. Through our giving open our hearts ever increasingly to you and your world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

## Communion

Included in how we love God is our freedom from sin by acceptance of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and rising again. We celebrate Jesus' Last Supper with the disciples which we will commemorate now. All are welcome to partake.

Hymn of Benediction from Faith We Sing Hymnal pg 2158: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"

Benediction