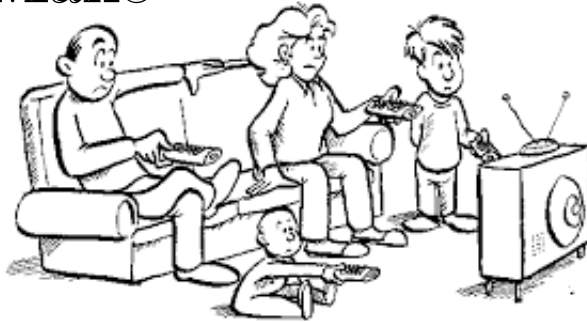


The Choices We Make

A sermon about choosing Christ
John 6:51-58 & Ephesians 5:15-20
Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad
Hudson United Methodist Church
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This summer between waves of COVID, one great pleasure of a pastor's work returned as I have been able to make home visits. Often, critical home visits happen as human maturing mean a big choice is on our horizon. One such visit stands out in my memory. Bob and Jane¹ were life-long Methodists who met at Epworth League, the precursor to Senior High Youth Group between World Wars I and II. Our visit happened when Bob and Jane were in their 90's and preparing to move from independent senior living into assisted living.

This visit was timed so Bob could turn on the television to watch his beloved Chicago Cubs right after I left. A portable television with rabbit ears was in reach near his recliner. During our visit, I learned Bob and Jane had met during high school a Methodist church where her dad was the pastor. It was easy math to figure out they had been married for over 70 years.

I asked them, "Do you have any tips I can pass on to others about how to make a marriage last?"

Both broke into a huge grin and Bob chuckled. Jane said, "Separate televisions! Mine is in our bedroom."

Now that so many homes have multiple screens for viewing, such advice seems obvious. How many screens do you have in your home? John and I are now a pair of empty nesters, but we have a smart television in our family room, an old television in our basement, two smart phones, two tablets, and four computer screens. We no longer have conflicts over which television show to watch. But when I was a teen, my parents accepted a used television with rabbit ears much like Bob's for our basement

¹ Bob and Jane were real members of a church I served. This visit happened in about 2009, so I assume that by now both have passed away since they would now be over 100 years old. As a preacher's child, Jane was very amused when I asked if I had their permission to use them as a positive example in future sermons.

just so they didn't have to live with my brother and I fighting over whatever Western it was he wanted to watch on CBS while I wanted to watch *The Monkees*² on NBC.

How many screens a home has or does not have is a homemaking choice. We can easily make a choice avoid conflict. Multiple screens also allows us to choose when we watch together—either in the same room or at the same time while we live in different cities. Did you choose chose to watch the Chicago White Sox host the New York Yankees in an Iowa corn field³—a true *Field of Dreams*⁴ with a sports fan you love? I did. I wonder if Jane would have watched the game of the century with Bob?

Choice for all generations from the Apostle Paul

Choice is always with us. Our Bible readings this week both speak of making choices. We can choose to follow Jesus, or we can go home. We can be drunk with wine, or we can be filled with the Spirit. Choices are decisions we make when we have options. Choices we make can be turning points in our living, the Gospel makes this clear. Choices we make also include how we live with each other in ways that help us become more like Christ.

Paul's message in Ephesians focuses on those daily choices all Christians make. Let's read his three key verses again: "So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times. Because of this, don't be ignorant, but understand the Lord's will." (Ephesians 5:15-17, Common English Bible/CEB)⁵ To follow Christ, Christians must learn to make new choices daily in their life. Within Ephesians 5, these verses are a hinge between examples of how we used to live and how we live now.

In last week's reading Paul began persuading us to imitate Christ. "Therefore, imitate God like dearly loved children. Live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. He was a sacrificial offering that smelled sweet to God." (Ephesians 5:1,2) In today's reading Paul makes the example that Christians can choose between getting drunk on wine or praying. One wonders why drunkenness was an issue he needed to address. Reading on we come to Paul's household code for Christians which delineates how a married couple should relate to each other, how parents and children in their home should interact, as well as how slaves and masters should now relate. After 80 generations of Christianity, we

² 1966-1968. (All production dates confirmed through Wikipedia.)

³ Thursday, 12 August 2021, Fox Television

⁴ Universal Pictures, starring Kevin Costner, 1989.

⁵ All Scripture citations copied and pasted from [www. Biblegateway.com](http://www.Biblegateway.com).

forget how liberating Paul's household code was to our first generation. The Roman Empire's household codes told wives, children, and slaves to honor the husbands, fathers, and masters, but said nothing about how husbands, fathers, and masters should treat their wives, children, and slaves. Paul was preaching a new thing when he said how we love Christ must lead to honoring each other as fellow Christians.

Paul wrote this code for Christians because when husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters are all seeking to be like Christ the world will change. After twenty centuries of reading Paul's words, Christians seeking to be like Christ can choose still to Paul's code as written—a prescription of something that must be done as written. This code still works as written in homes with two parents and minor children. While we can never go back to Eden with Adam and Eve, we can choose to be like Christ with who we live with now as we draw closer to the great gathering heaven when time ends.

A Sad Illustration

We are in week three of four weeks as the Revised Common Lectionary leads us to carefully consider what choice we can make about Christ as the bread of life. Two weeks ago, we considered Christ as the wheat or grain in all bread and ourselves as the *et cetera* that makes every loaf of bread and likewise every local church as Christ's body unique. Last week in John 6, we heard Jesus compare himself with manna during the Exodus to his first listeners, and the sermon compared Christ as Bread of Life to our daily prayers coupled with Bible reading.

Jesus provoked a conflict forcing people to choose. On hearing his words, Jesus' listeners were forced to make one of two choices as they heard, "I am the Bread of Life." This conflict was more complicated than solving a dispute over which television channel to watch by adding another screen, another option. This conflict requires one to choose daily.

Sadly, one group thought "*Mashugana!*" This boy of Joseph's is crazy. I have heard enough of this nonsense. I am going home." The other group chose to stay with Jesus, like a wife choosing to watch "the game of the century" with her husband rather than using their second television to tune into *The Crown*⁶ once again.

⁶ Netflix, 2016 to present.

Our Choice Now

We have no idea what happened with those who heard Jesus say, “I am the Bread of Life” and chose to believe he was crazy. They have left our story. From this point through to next Sunday, by reading on in John’s gospel we will learn from one who chose to accept Jesus as the Bread of Life.

John was one person who stayed. Only John wrote accounts of how Jesus said “I am living water” in John 5, “the bread of life” in John 6, “the light of the world” in John 8 & 9, “the gate” as well as “the good shepherd” in John 10, and “the resurrection and the life” in John 11. We worship as Christians today because generations before us have made the choice to believe Christ is the Bread of Life so we too can choose following Christ.

Friends, we live in a story that goes on until that great day when Christ comes again. There are certainly big moments when we know we are choosing to follow Christ, when we choose to be a member of a particular local church. But we also have daily choices as we learn from Christ. For some of us, Paul’s words on choosing between getting drunk or praying is a choice that will be made today. Others of us must be inspired to make Paul’s drunkenness example to inspire us in another choice we must make daily. There is always something else we can substitute in for “getting drunk” rather than praying—say binge watching *The Great British Baking Show*⁷ rather than taking time to pray.

Also, we no longer live in the Roman Empire when a male head of house was singly responsible for everyone. That ethic has passed out of our American legal code over the whole of the 20th century. As Christians we could choose to follow Paul’s code literally, or in our homes we can choose to look at Paul’s code for then as inspiration about how we live together in senior housing, how we relate to our parents as their adult child they now trust to care for them because they can no longer care for themselves, and how we treat essential workers whose vocations always serve the greater needs of our community.

We each have a choice to follow Christ or to go our own way. Let us pray:

Christ, my Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the person I cannot change, the courage to change to person I can, and the wisdom to know I am both of those people. Amen.

⁷ My personal favorite mindless background television available on more platforms than I can count. There is even a *Great British Baking Show* channel among those streamed to our smart television.