

February 12, 2017  
Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Deuteronomy 30:15–20 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Going to the grocery store is so stressful! There are so many choices. I remember when my options for ice cream were chocolate and vanilla. My choice of soups was narrow, and there was a limited number of cereals.

Today, a visit to the grocery overwhelms the shopper with a virtual kaleidoscope of choices on almost every aisle.

Ice cream? Baskin-Robbins' thirty-one flavors is no big deal. We expect to see custom flavors.

Soups? Just the various "cream ofs" (chicken, celery, asparagus) to make a casserole can keep you staring at that one shelf. Oh, and should it be low sodium or regular? And guess what?

They don't just have Campbell's!

Cereals? For your morning chocolate fix, it's not just Cocoa Puffs or Cocoa Krispies. Consider several varieties of Krave, which is almost like eating chocolate icing covered in sugar.

There are just so many choices!

The choices are not just limited to shopping at the grocery store. Our world and our society have also become a "land of Canaan", a land of moral choices.

Alternative and optional lifestyles connected with a growing lack of morals introduce a whole catalog of personal choices and individualistic decisions that are expected to be accepted.

It is nice to have choices. In fact, many would probably propose that having choices is a divine right. Honestly, we can propose that choices are truly God given.

Except we quickly discover that God offers only two choices.

This morning's text clearly states what God has placed before us:

*"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (v 15).*

The choice of life, good, is characterized by obedience to God's Commandments.

But as God places these Commandments before us, He also creates in us the new life that enables us to be obedient to them. So, as we'll see, it turns out we really don't have too many choices.

Our text is the conclusion of a lengthy conversation that began back in Deuteronomy 27 when Moses begins his farewell words to the Israelites.

Earlier, he reminded them of the conditions of God's covenant and reminded Israel once again of the ingredients of their relationship with the Lord their God.

He states clearly what will bring blessings and what will bring curses.

Their choice is simple. Obey God's Commandments and be blessed; disobey, and be cursed. There is no middle ground—and, really, that's not a lot of choice. God really commands us to make just one choice: life, through obedience to His commands.

We must ask ourselves why this was so important. Let's look at Deuteronomy 28.

<sup>1</sup> *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ...<sup>9</sup> The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways.*

Deuteronomy 28:1, 9 (ESV)

God called Israel and set them apart in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12: *“Through you all the nations of the world shall be blessed.”*

As God wove His will throughout history, He gathered a people whom He would equip and place in a strategic location so that they might be a light to the nations and that through them all the nations of the world would come to know the one true God.

The laws and commands God delivered to Israel were the means through which they were able to be this *“light to the nations”* and a witness that would draw other nations to them.

God's commands are still the means through which His people display their peculiarity and reflect the uniqueness of the one true God.

When we tell our buddies, sure, we'll look forward to meeting them at the lake . . . right after church, they'll know we worship a different God than fishing or waterskiing.

When our language and jokes are noticeably clean, when at work we tactfully but unmistakably change the subject away from bad-mouthing the other guy, people will know we're somehow different. When we speak lovingly and respectfully about our spouses and children instead of piling on those "Yeah, you know how kids are these days" conversations, folks will see there's a lot of loving going on here.

Just as with Israel, so it is with us, God still requires obedience to His Commandments so that we might continue to be a "light to the nations."

The exhortation that immediately precedes our text for today is shocking, at least to sinful man. Moses declares in v 11, "*For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you.*" Who of us would say "Amen!" to that declaration? None of us!

Our sinful nature continually finds itself at war with God's Commandments. The Law of God is a burden for sinful man, keeping us from doing the things our flesh desires and creating an inward struggle that causes us to be lured into the wrong choices—lots of them.

The Commandments God gave to Israel were much more than just ten rules. The preceding chapters revealed to us many more specifics about how the people of Israel were to treat one another and also the outsider. This was a Theocracy with God both ruler and God.

So God outlined the manner Israel was to live in every aspect. He gave ordinances about property rights, on being a witness, warfare, unsolved murders, marrying female captives, inheritance rights, rebellious children, sexual immorality, uncleanness, divorce, and then a whole bunch of miscellaneous laws.

And these commands are not burdensome? *Really?*

Well, what God requires of us He produces in us. V 6 of ch 30 proclaims the Good News:

*“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”*

Part of the Good News here in Deuteronomy 30 is that God does not say, *“Circumcise your hearts!”* as though he were calling on us to accomplish the required change through our own efforts.

See, God isn't leaving this choice up to us. No, not really. The one acceptable choice He in fact makes for us by Himself “circumcising our hearts.” The passage clearly proclaims that God will accomplish that which He requires. Our text says that *“he [the Lord] is your life”* (v 20). Left to our sinful, selfish nature, we cannot obey the Commandments of the Lord. Yet, *He* will “cut off” the hardness of our hearts and produce in us a longing and loving to do His will and obey his Commandments.

How will he do this? God changes the hearts of men to do His will by continually and repeatedly loving them in the midst of their sinfulness and rejection, that is, by showing mercy, grace, and forgiveness to a rebellious people.

Time and again, before this point in history and for many centuries to come, God will circumcise the hearts of His people by displaying His abundant grace and mercy. This assurance Moses receives when God calls Him back to Mount Sinai to chisel new tablets of stone after he's broken the original ones over Israel's worshiping the golden calf. Ex 34:6–7 reads: *“The Lord passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”*

He ultimately reveals the reason behind God's mercy and grace for a rebellious people when He sends His only Son to die on the cross. Jesus' atonement for the sins of all people is the reason we are delivered from God's just punishment.

*“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). The love with which Christ Himself loved us and willingly went to the cross is the love that compels us to love Him in return and to love others:*

*“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. <sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor 5:14–17)*

The other way this chapter brings us the Good News of Christ follows that shocking challenge we just heard:

*“For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” (30:11–14)*

The power God gives to us to choose life and obey His Commandments is near us; it is in our mouths and in our hearts. The grace and mercy that brings about such a change in our hearts is offered to us through the Word and Sacraments, which deliver Jesus Christ and His forgiveness to us. These, God’s Means of Grace, not our choice really, do enable us to live faithfully in obedience to Him.

In Holy Baptism, God circumcised the heart by washing away the hardness that exists because of original sin and creating in us a new man formed and fashioned in the likeness of Christ.

Likewise, in Holy Baptism, God fills us with the power to put to death each day the old nature that desires to cling to us and allow the new nature to come forth, fully equipped to live and serve Him according to his good and gracious will.

Our gracious heavenly Father continues to sustain this work in us as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes to us in His Holy Supper and strengthens us each day to walk in obedience to His will and serve Him faithfully.

All of this gracious working in us produces what Paul labels *“the obedience of faith.”* Rom 1:4–5 offers these strengthening words: *“Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.”*

The obedience that comes through faith is the loving desire to do God’s will and obey His Commandments, not because we see them as a way to righteousness, but because they are the display of the righteousness we have already been given through faith in Christ Jesus. Obedience, then, is our way to display a loving response to Him who loved us in Christ.

Thus, equipped through Word and Sacrament, we can go forth into a world of temptation, testings, and moral imbalance—so many evil choices—fully capable of making the one right choice between two paths.

We don’t really have, don’t want, any other choices. We choose to obey God’s voice, follow Him, and turn aside from the many voices of the devil, the world, and our flesh.

Like Israel of old, called to be a light to the nations through obedience to God’s commands, so we are a new nation going forth into a land clouded in darkness and needing to see the light of life and salvation.

As we continue to gather around God’s Word and Sacraments, we will be guided to choose life and to offer to the world new life now and eternal life in the age to come.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.