

**“The Lord is Your Life”**

*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).*

Do you remember your first day of school? For some of you, the first day of school brought excitement and anticipation. For others however, leaving the comforts of home and stepping into an unknown building with a bunch of strange people was an unsettling if not traumatic experience. For me, starting Kindergarten was easy. My dad was the principal of our school and I had already spent a lot of time in the building, so my first day of school wasn't a big deal...but my first days of high school and later as a college student were awful. In both cases, I was entering a world I knew nothing about, with people I had never met and I was terrified at what this new chapter in life would bring. The thought of those days still tightens my stomach.

Experiences like these make quite an impact on us and in my vocation as a pastor I am often called to walk beside people as they move through times of transition. In fact, in the last month alone I've had conversations with bleary-eyed, first-time parents trying to adjust to life without sleep. I've met with people who have lost jobs and are struggling with how they will get the bills paid. I've officiated at three weddings and watched as each newlywed couple awkwardly took their first oblivious steps into marriage. I've also stood beside a casket with a husband who now faced the prospect of a life without a wife for the first time in over forty years. I've comforted empty-nesters who have sent their last kids off to college and I've even held the door for anxious moms bringing their children into the building for their very first day of preschool. Life is full of transition. I'm sure my perspective is colored by the work I do but, in so many ways, life is a maze of change and for us, those times of transition almost always bring with them a sense of anxiety and feelings of uncertainty as we stand on the brink of the unknown.

In today's reading from Deuteronomy, we are witnesses to one of the greatest transitions in the history of God's people. This section of Scripture, which actually begins back in chapter 29, features the last words of instruction that Moses spoke to Israel as their leader. As you may remember, Moses had disobeyed God's instructions in the wilderness and, as a punishment, God told Moses he would not enter the land God had given on oath to His people. Now they stood at the edge of the Promised Land. They looked out into an unknown country filled with godless and hostile enemies and Moses would not be going with them. The man God had used to lead His people out of Egypt and across Red Sea on dry ground; the man through whom God had provided His Law at Sinai and fed His people with manna as they wandered in the wilderness; the man who had served as God's spokesman and by whose hand the people had been sustained for forty years; the life of their leader had come to its end and the people were about to make a huge transition without him.

This is the setting for today's text and as they stood together on the plains of Moab this was Moses' last chance to equip God's people for the monumental changes that awaited them just over the horizon and, as they prepared to end their wilderness wandering, his words were anything but ambiguous. Moses said, "I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction...This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20).

In this pivotal moment, as God's people were poised to enter a land that served as the culmination of their forty-year journey, Moses confronted them with simple and yet very distinct choices: Life or death! Blessings or curses! Prosperity or destruction! As we hear the bold and stark options Moses laid out in his farewell speech the choice seems more than obvious, and yet Moses knew these people. He had seen their parents die for their sin and, as he watched this generation come of age in the wilderness, he had heard their complaints, he had

judged their disputes, he had thrown up his hands in frustration at their disobedience and he had provided intercession for them, begging for God's mercy. He knew these people and he knew the inevitable sin that lay ahead of them and yet, passionately and purposefully in this final address he implores them and pleads with them to choose life so that they and their children may live.

It's easy to hear these words as conditional statements about God's favor. After all, Moses essentially tells them, "If you choose wisely and do what's right, then God will bless you with good things." The language from this reading can easily be heard this way, but nothing could be further from the truth. Earlier, I mentioned that this address to the people had started back in chapter 29 and it's very important to note that before he gets to the bold language of choice in today's text, Moses looks back and he tells them their story! He reminds them how God had chosen them to be His people. He recalls the dramatic deliverance from Egypt, he shows them how God had provided for them in the wilderness where their shoes had not worn out and their stomachs had remained full and in this story of deliverance and protection and provision Moses renews God's covenant.

Today, as we consider the meaning of this story in our own lives we need to see the parallels between their story and our story...because, my friends, their story *is* our story! We need to be reminded that in spite of our weakness and rejection of God, and in the wilderness of our disobedience and unbelief...God has come to us and He has chosen us! He has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light! He has spoken to us by His Word! He has washed us in the waters of Baptism! He has fed us with His Body and strengthened us Blood! And He has promised us a home! In Christ, *that* is our salvation story and the story of salvation through Jesus Christ is what this day is all about!

Today we celebrate and underscore the importance of Christian education at every level and as we hold up this ministry to which we have been called as parents and pastors and teachers and students, these words of God are words for us! Today, God sets before us life and death, blessings and curses, prosperity and destruction...and the stakes couldn't be any higher. We are dealing with ultimate and eternal things and yet these choices all hinge on what God has already done. The story of our life and the reality of our eternal future is *in every way* tied to the story of salvation that God has worked out for us in the death and resurrection of His Son. In the cross of Christ, God's wrath was satisfied, our punishment was delivered and the death, destruction and curses that we deserve were fully met in Him. And it is this path walked for us by Christ that has opened the door of prosperity and blessing and of a life that will never end. And that is why Moses' words matter!

Like the children of Israel, we are facing a future that is full of transition. For some of you, these transitions will be traumatic and for all of us the reality of change brings with it the temptation to walk our own way and without the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will always choose our own way...but the story of Gods sustains us and the Spirit of God strengthens us and in the midst of life's transitions, and in the face of our fear and weakness God is always there with forgiveness and life and salvation.

In a very real sense, the radical words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy are echoed by Jesus in our Gospel reading when he says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). You see, when two paths diverge the differences can seem imperceptible, but the farther you walk down the path the greater the differences become. The words of Moses and of Jesus in today's readings dispel any illusion that we can walk two paths. And their bold and shocking call is meant to remind us that only in the Lord is there life. My friends, we have been chosen and delivered and protected and the Promised Land is a reality that in Christ Jesus we will see and today God says to us, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life." By God's grace and because of God's choice, this is your story and you can choose life! Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold