

2012 Life Sunday Sermon
Text: Deuteronomy 30:19
Theme: The Journey
Pastor Gary Blobaum

I want you to think about a journey you once took. You may not remember it. It was a long time ago and you have never been back to that place. But I think you made this journey; nearly everyone has. It was a journey by water, a marine expedition. Actually, submarine.

When you were smaller than a poppy seed, you sallied forth. You embarked on a week-long, roiling, cascading journey down a fallopian tube.

I know this is strange to think about. I know it is strange to talk about. And I know it is strange and difficult to imagine. But this was really you.

You did not know where you were going. No one asked if you were ready. You received no instructions. But you put to sea. For the first week of your life, you simply floated.

Imagine you had been conscious. They say consciousness flickers in at about six weeks, but imagine you had been fully aware from the beginning. An embryo—a tiny, mulberry cluster of cells—you spin, you swirl, you tumble. You are at the mercy of forces beyond you. Had you been conscious, you would have come to either of two conclusions: either a merciless current is sweeping me away, or a guiding current is carrying me where I need to be. In other words, you would have had two choices: panic or trust.

But was the *first* week of your life all that different from every subsequent week?

These days, you are conscious. In full consciousness, you experience love and betrayal, promise and disappointment. And you come to either of two conclusions: either a merciless current is sweeping me away, or a guiding current is carrying me where I need to be. You have two choices: panic or trust.

In the fallopian tube, at the beginning of the journey, we are not aware; we cannot make those choices. We can only float—let the current carry us. It's almost as if the dial is being preset for trust, as if trust is the inescapable structure of human life, as if we were created for faith. We would have to reset the dial in order to turn away from life in doubt, panic, and rebellion.

We did not have the ability to say “no” to our own life. God said “yes,” and that was that. God wanted you. So God made sure not to put that choice in your hands, not just yet. In fact, God *commanded* you to be. In the exact cadence of His words at the beginning of creation, God said: “Let there be Abigail. Let there be Ramon. Let there be Maya.” And it was so. You came into being and God saw that you were very good. And the Lord guided you into life.

But there comes a time when we do, when we must, choose. “[T]oday...**I have set before you life and death...**” says God. “**Therefore choose life...**” (Deuteronomy 30: 19). Thankfully, God tells us how to make that choice. God says: Do not let your heart turn away; do not be drawn away to other gods. (See Deuteronomy 30:17.)

In other words, the way to choose life is to never choose death. The dial is preset for life, for trust; keep it there. Yes, it is a perilous journey—like tubing on a raging river—but keep trusting. Don’t panic. Just as at the beginning, the Lord is still guiding you. As surely as when you were in the fallopian tube, the Lord still carries you. Listen to the Lord’s guidance. Listen to the voice that knows you, that knows your journey.

But this is how we choose death: when we listen to the make-believe “gods,” when we listen to the demons, they throw us into a panic. “It’s impossible,” they whisper. “You have stepped beyond the help of God. Take matters into your own hands. You have to. You have no choice.” And we stop trusting; we refuse to let the guiding current of God’s Word carry us.

Mary and Jake were in love, planning to get married. Jake was two weeks from graduation. He’d already secured a position with a company in London, so Mary, with her nursing degree in hand, flew across the pond and hired on at a London hospital. She rented an apartment, set up housekeeping, and was twenty-four hours away from starting work when Jake called. He wasn’t moving to London. He’d been offered a better job in New York City.

The phone call was ugly. Jake broke up with the woman he loved, and Mary—who can blame her?—said she needed an ocean between herself and jerks like him and decided to become a Brit.

Later that day, Mary wondered: “Am I just queasy because I’m suddenly all alone, starting work tomorrow, and scared to death? Or am I queasy because...” “ She decided to get a pregnancy test. It was positive.

And she panicked. “My life is going down the *tube!*” she cried. “What is happening to me? What else can go wrong?” For a millisecond she entertained the notion of actually having the baby. But, Jake’s baby? Are you kidding? She’d get the abortion as soon as possible.

The next morning on the subway—excuse me, in Britain it’s called “the tube”—the next morning in the tube, Mary worried whether she had boarded the correct train. She inquired of a Metronet worker who was passing down the aisle. “The exact one,” replied the worker. “You are just where you need to be.” The Metronet worker moved on, but not before Mary caught the name on her badge: “Cecelia.” For some reason, Mary’s thoughts jumped to the word “cilia.” Cilia are the hair-like structures that line a fallopian tube. They wave back and forth creating a current, a current that guides the embryo to the uterus, to where it needs to be. Mary’s favorite teacher in nursing school used to say the cilia were cheering the embryo on: “Go, little person, keep going.”

“There ought to be some cilia around to guide grown-ups,” Mary thought. Just then a young woman entered the tube and sat beside her. “Hi, I’m Liz.” Liz, it turned out, was also a nurse. She worked at the hospital where Mary was to start that morning. Liz was easy to talk to.

As they walked from the tube to the hospital, Mary and Liz passed a church. Wistfully, Mary thought about going in sometime to pray. But she must have gazed at the church a moment too long. “Do you go to church?” Liz asked.

“Um, yes,” said Mary. Then she added quickly: “sometimes.”

“I’m a Christian,” said Liz. Before they parted they agreed to meet for lunch.

“I wonder if she was named for Queen Elizabeth,” thought Mary as Liz walked away to her floor. Then it struck her: Elizabeth. In the Bible, that’s who Mary told about her pregnancy. “Oh, God, no,” she said. “No! I am not telling anyone.”

How could she even think of having a baby? No friends, a new job, and her family an ocean away. “It’s impossible,” she concluded. “I have no choice. I *have* to take matters into my own hands.”

But we do have a choice. God said, “[T]oday...**I have set before you life and death... Therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live**” (Deuteronomy 30:19). The way to choose life is to trust. Did you think human life was going to be humanly possible? It’s not. It was never meant to be. Guiding a human being through the journey of life is possible only for God. That’s why the only way to choose life is to trust, to trust God. God gives no one a possible life. The call of God is to an impossible life. Otherwise, why trust? And life was created for trust.

At lunch did Mary pour out her soul to Liz? And did Liz take her hand and say: “I’m here for you. We’ll get through this together.” And did Mary have her baby? And did Jake come to his bloody senses, quit his job, fly to London, beg forgiveness from the woman he loved, and become a Brit along with her? And does Mary feel more ready to trust God than ever? And does she feel really alive, more alive than she’s ever been?

If so, this could only have happened through the “*cilia*” by which God guides us through life: the people who love us and cheer us on, the Word of God in church and Bible, and the sacraments of Baptism and holy Communion. Through these, God guides and carries us and ever unfolds the journey he created for our life.

Or did she abort the baby? Did she take matters into her own hands? And was it after the abortion that she began to slip into that church every afternoon to pray? “Oh, Christ, as you have carried my life, carry also my sin; carry it to the cross and suffer it away.” Does she look up at the statue, at those nail-pierced hands, and plead that somehow Christ still holds her baby in *His* hand? And does she walk out of that church feeling more ready to trust God than ever, and really alive, more alive than she has ever been?

If so, this could only have happened because even though every human being has turned away from Him in doubt, panic, and rebellion, God found a way—the cross—to carry us still in the current of His Word, His forgiving love.

These two choices are vastly different. But one thing is the same: to choose Jesus is to choose life. For Jesus holds every life—even the tiniest—in the nail-scarred palm of His hand.