

2012 Life Sunday Sermon

Text: Deuteronomy 30:19b, Ephesians 1:3-14, John 15:12-20

Theme: Good Choice

Paul Sajban, Pastor at The Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Windom, Minnesota

Prayer before sermon:

Gracious Father, You remind us that we are precious in Your sight. Redeemed by Your Son and our Savior Jesus, You invite us to call upon You at all times and in every circumstance of life and You will hear us. We call upon You now that You would bring Your precious Word to bear in our minds, our hearts, and our lives of faith, that we may always honor and glorify You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior. Amen. Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God, our Father, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We live in a land of many choices. Well, at least we live in a land with the freedom to make many choices. We may not always have the resources or the money to make such choices, but some of them lie ever before us as “The American Dream.” Some choices are fairly easy to make. Others, however, cause us to rack our hearts and souls to make them. Just think of a family gathered in a hospital waiting room having to choose whether to disconnect the machines keeping a dear mother or father alive. Such is not an easy choice. Through prayer and consultation of God’s Word and with the help of their pastor such a difficult choice will be made. Not all, however, would use these good resources to make a choice between life and death. Sometimes it comes down to using human reason and wisdom, without consulting God’s wisdom to make even the most difficult choices of life. Which do you think should be the standard for the Christian?

Not even all Christians consult the Lord before making some of the most important choices of life. Many do not even consider consulting God when it comes to such things as choosing a career, a spouse, a church home, and making other very serious, life-changing decisions. Sometimes we may resort to consulting our fickle feelings or even the world’s wisdom and standards in making such choices. This has been an ongoing problem even among people who think of themselves as God’s people. Such is why Moses put before the people of God the exhortation that he did. It is an exhortation that is just as valid for the people of God today as it was to those people of God waiting to enter the promised land of

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Canaan approximately 3418 years ago. He says to them and to us today, “...**choose life, that you and your offspring may live**” (Deuteronomy 13:19b). Some of the choices we make will have generational consequences. What do I mean by this? Well, some of the choices you may make will affect not only you as an individual, but will also affect your children and grandchildren. Children learn from their parents a whole bunch more than their parents want them to learn. If only they would learn from the good that we say and do. But unfortunately our children learn also from the bad, the evil, the sin that we do. We hand on to our children such things as impatience, quick tempers, bad language, disrespect for our nation’s leaders, an unforgiving, vengeful heart, and sometimes even a disrespect for God’s commands and laws. If we don’t really show much of a concern for learning and knowing God’s Word in all its wisdom our children see this and learn that they too do not need to learn or understand God’s Word all that much. And though we say in our hearts, “This should not be,” we find ourselves choosing sin rather than God’s way much too often.

Today, we ponder what God in His Word says about human life. We want to hand on to our children a Godly respect not only for their own life, but also for the life of the neighbor, that is everyone outside their own life including the unborn baby, the elderly, the sick and the dying, the person who does not think her life is worth much. Unless parents hand down this Godly wisdom of life to their children, the only wisdom they will have to choose from is the broken and so often death affirming foolishness of the world. This proud, “I demand my rights” foolishness of man stands against God and His righteous and holy ways. We have to teach our children to not only see their life as precious and given and kept graciously by God, but also to see all human life around them in the same way. We teach them to make choices, for the less important incidental things of life such as choosing clothes and shoes and good food, to brush their teeth and study hard. How much more important is it to teach them of God’s good gift of life to each of them and each and every individual, that they may be trained in Godly, life-affirming righteousness?

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Only when we consider the true God who made His choice for us despicable, sin-filled humans will we be able to daily live in, and pass on, true eternal choice of life to the next generation. The words of Deuteronomy call us to “choose life,” but we must first see another choice found earlier in this book that gives us the motivation to make such Godly life choices. What stood behind God’s choice of you? Let’s hear from Deuteronomy 7: **“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery...”** (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

God’s choice proceeds from His perfect love of the “fewest or least” of people. Can we put unborn babies in this category? Can we see grandma with Alzheimer’s who no longer recognizes her children or grandchildren here? Can we put the woman who sinned by having an abortion or the father of an unborn child who insisted on such to his pregnant girlfriend in this category? How about that person who sees no reason for living and having lost all hope in life sees taking his own life as the only way out? In some eyes, including his own, this one is the least. But in God’s eyes he is the most precious person. His worth is not determined by his failures in God’s eyes. But rather the Lord reaches out to those whose failures in sin may have brought them to the precipice of death and says to them, “You are worth the greatest and best gift, the death of My Son for your life. You are not a failure, but one of My greatest creations worth the sacrifice.”

“Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). The Apostle Paul spoke these words, but they fit each and every sinner including you and me. We each are the least, but the greatest in our heavenly Father’s eyes.

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The oath the Living Lord made with our forefathers is an oath of redemption, to redeem all of us “lost and condemned creatures,” to purchase and win us to Him through Jesus’ blood-bought forgiveness to His righteousness, to freedom of life now, and to eternal life. Though the people of Israel were slaves of labor in Egypt, there was a greater slavery from which the Almighty God of Life redeemed them. And it was not by the mighty power seen through the plagues that He purchased and has won all sinners, but with the precious blood of His Son, “given and shed for you for the remission of sins.” God has chosen us whose sin also is sin against God-given life. We too often fail to acknowledge and respect the life He has given each of us and we fail to care for and show Godly mercy toward the life of our neighbor.

God’s Life Commandment, most specifically the 5th Commandment, tells us, “You shall not murder.” Its simple meaning as explained by Dr. Martin Luther says, “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt nor harm our neighbor in His body, but help and support him in every physical need.” We do not do this when we sit idly by while abortion, euthanasia, suicide is going on around us and we make no witness against it. We do not do any service of mercy to our neighbor, including the women who have had abortions or the families or individuals who decide to end their lives by suicide and euthanasia, and remain silent about God’s Word of Life. There is a Word of Life that tells us, “You shall not murder,” and a Word of Life that brings Jesus, the Life of all the Living into the lives of those who have so broken this command. You and I have not always loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have at times torn them down through bitter words, gossip, unfriendly actions, and lack of active, caring response when we have seen such a neighbor in need. There are times we have been unforgiving toward a neighbor and have not afforded them the same mercy that God has freely given to you and me. The right attitude of life toward our neighbor begins with a fear and love of God, the Author of Life.

Teaching our children and grandchildren in His Words and in our actions to fear and love God above all things will lead them to choose life. Our fear and love of God comes as we, by God-given and nourished faith, trust in the perfect and free redemption to freedom of life He has given us in His Son.

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God's Law teaches us fear of punishment. His Gospel of salvation in Jesus teaches us freedom from fear through the forgiveness freely given by our Savior.

This is Life Sunday. The god of this world says, "Choose death," when he holds before a scared and pregnant woman the option of abortion. The true God of Life says to such a one, "Choose life. I will be with you, for I have redeemed you and your little unborn one for life." The god of this world says, "Choose death." to a teen who has faced broken relationships, an unloving home, the seemingly at the time overbearing burdens of life. The true God and Savior of Life says, "Choose life. I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I gave My life for you." The god of this world says to the aging parent who begins to feel she is a burden to her children, "Choose death. It will be better for everyone if you did." The Father of Life says, "Choose Life. Your worth is not determined by what you can no longer do, but rather by how much you are worth in My sight. I have sent My Son for you." The worth of human life to the god of this world is non-existent. The worth of life to the true God of Life is greater than can be measured by human standards and is seen distinctly on a cross and in an empty tomb. Each of us is reminded by the Word of the true God of Life, "**My times are in Your hand**" (Psalm 31:15a).

Let's not take our times out of the true hands of mercy, God's hands in Christ Jesus. Remember His nail-scarred hands. He tells us by the prophet Isaiah, "**Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands**" (Isaiah 49:16a). This we can see so clearly in the marks of salvation that are still visible in our Redeemer and Lord Jesus. Our risen and living Lord showed these wounds of love to His disciples as He appeared to them after His resurrection. He wants us also to see these wounds of love and mercy and forgiveness as we are called to make choices of Life.

So many choices. How to make the right ones, the choices for life for ourselves and our children? The choices stand before us as adults. Will we live the life choices and so share in word and deed the right choices with our children? Or will we continue to be drawn into the deadly and destructive storm of sinful and selfish human choice?

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Can you hear your Savior's voice calling to you, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...”** (John 15:16). Our fruit of life abides only as we abide in Him as Savior, even and most especially when we fail Him as sinners. His cleansing blood unto death has brought you life through the forgiveness of your sins. He laid down His life for you, that you may lay down your life for your neighbor including your brothers and sisters in faith, your family, friends and the stranger who may cross your path, those who may not know this God of Life. Therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live in Christ day by day. Lord Jesus, open our eyes to the abundant life that is ours through Your perfect sacrifice for the life of the world, knowing by faith You chose us. Amen.