

2012 Life Sunday Sermon

Texts: Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Theme: Chosen People Choose Life

Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

Introduction

“Choose life!” How could such a positive, biblical statement stir up such controversy? It’s because this statement is associated with the abortion debate and that always stirs things up. There may be people here today who would just as soon not be talking about this. You might be thinking, “Abortion is a political issue or a social problem or we might offend someone.” Perhaps someone here has been involved in an abortion decision and it’s uncomfortable hearing it talked about. Others might be glad we are talking about it.

“Choose life!” can stir things up because it is associated with abortion. Our text, however, is not about abortion. It is about what we as God’s people base our choices upon. We do not choose based just upon *what* we are choosing. We base our choices upon *who* has chosen us—*Chosen People Choose Life*. So let’s look first at the fact that we are chosen.

The Chosen

In this text God speaks to His chosen people, people He rescued from the slavery of Egypt, people about to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Why did He choose these people that He so often refers to as “stiff necked”? We find the answer in Deuteronomy 7, “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, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (7-8). The covenant God made with these Old Testament people was one sided. It was not, “You do this for Me and I’ll do for this you.” It was, “I’ve done this! I’ve chosen you and you had nothing to do with it.” They were not chosen because they were special people. They were special people because they were chosen.

So it is with God’s New Testament people. Peter writes, “But you”—all of you, the Church—“are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

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You are God's chosen people today, people He has rescued from the slavery of sin, people on your way to the Promised Land of heaven. This group of people here this morning is special because you are chosen.

We can take it down one step further. Each of you as an individual is special because you are chosen, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and then called in the waters of your baptism to be a child of God. Each of you has been chosen, rescued from the slavery of your sin, and on your way to heavenly glory. Each one of you is special because you were chosen.

So that's who we have here this morning—chosen individuals united together as chosen people. We live our lives in the context of being chosen. We make our choices in the context of being chosen. Most of you are familiar with this scene. You're with your child or grandchild and someone offers them a piece of candy. What's the first thing they do? They turn and look at you with that, "Is this going to be okay?" look. We are God's chosen children purchased and won with the blood of Jesus. He "set his love" on us when we were completely undeserving. We can trust Him. When faced with choices, therefore, the first thing we need to do is turn to Him, "Is this going to be okay?"

The Choice of Another God

Chosen!—that's the context for our choices. Now let's look at the choice God places before His chosen in our text. We see it phrased in a couple of ways—good or evil, blessing or curse. But both flow from the choice of life or death. Good and blessing follow the choice of life and evil and curses follow the choice of death. And yet, the fundamental choice runs even deeper than life or death. Fundamentally, the choice is to trust God or turn away to other gods. That was Israel's constant problem was it not? That's why God's warned, "But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them . . ." (30:17) that's when the evil and the curses will come.

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Death is the god of choice in our culture today. We choose death through abortion to rescue us from a crisis pregnancy. We choose death through the destruction of human embryos to rescue us from disease. We choose death through assisted suicide to rescue us from pain and suffering. In the Large Catechism under the First Commandment Luther says that whatever we turn to for more “good and help than God” becomes our god (Tappert, 368, 28). But the god of death only seems to offer “good and help.” In reality, “evil and curses” follow in its wake. Some examples:

It is estimated that over 32,000 people are negatively affected by an abortion decision every single day in our country. An innocent, unborn child is destroyed. The mother of that child has her life changed forever. The father of that child has his life changed forever. Grandparents, siblings, friends, society itself—all suffer greatly as the result of a single abortion. Death does not relieve the burden, “evil and curses” follow in its wake.

Allow me to pause just in case there is someone so burdened here today. A woman who had an abortion once asked, “How come abortion is the only sin that gets its own Sunday?” Although this is “Sanctity of Human Life Sunday” and not “The Sin of Abortion Sunday,” her point is well taken. It reminds us that it is not the sin of abortion that separates us from God. Sin separates us from God. We all stand equally guilty before Him. But the sin of abortion, because of its nature, can be more difficult to deal with than some other sins. That’s why I want to make sure that if you are burdened with this particular sin, you know you are welcome here with all the rest of us sinners. You are welcome as one chosen in Christ Jesus. You are welcome as one cleansed by His blood. But you, more than anyone else here, knows the affects of choosing death to solve our problems are so prominent that we need to continue.

Assisted suicide has been legal in the Netherlands for many years. But they moved beyond that to euthanasia. They have moved from euthanasia for terminal illness to euthanasia for chronic illness and to euthanasia for mental distress. They have moved from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia

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which they call, “termination of the patient without specific request.” Death does not relieve the burden, “evil and curses” follow in its wake.

This obsession with death as our god who can rescue us from our problems has especially manifested itself since the legalization of abortion in 1973. The massive devaluing and destruction of human life in the womb necessarily leads to the devaluing of human life in all stages. It has overflowed into an alarming climb in teen suicide. It has overflowed into a drastic increase in the incidence of child abuse. It has overflowed into our classrooms with children killing children. Death does not relieve the burden, “evil and curses” follow in its wake.

The Choice to Trust in God

The choice of death as our rescuer-god always leads to “evil and curses.” There has never been a choice of death that rescues us from our problems and leads to life. Well . . . there was that one time!

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus chose death “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9b). Jesus chose suffering and death to pay the price we owed God because of our sin. Jesus chose death to destroy it once and for all through His resurrection from the dead. Jesus chose death and “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10b). Jesus chose death to rescue us. We never have to! Jesus chose death and He has chosen you and you have been baptized into His death and into His resurrection.

That is your assurance that you can trust Him. That is your assurance that you can choose life. It really is that simple. God says so Himself in our text. “For this commandment I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven . . . Neither is it beyond the sea . . . But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (11-14). You can do it! You can trust God because He has set His love upon you in Christ. You can trust God because He

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promises that nothing can ever separate you from that love. You can trust God because He promises never to leave or forsake you. You can trust God because He promises to be at work in every aspect of your life accomplishing His will. You can trust God because He loves you and has proven that love in the death and resurrection of Jesus. You can trust God because He “sets His love upon you” every time you come to His holy meal to receive the very price He paid to rescue you, His chosen people.

You can trust God and choose life and be assured that good and blessings will follow. “You and your offspring” will live (19c). Generations are involved here. The choice of life means life continues. The choice of life means new life can be given in holy baptism. The choice of life means love for “the LORD your God” will increase as you focus on His love. The choice of life means obedience to “his voice” will increase as you trust in Him more and more “holding fast to him” (20).

That is why we need to be talking about abortion and the other life issues in our churches. It’s more than just “speaking against” something going on “out there.” It is “speaking for” those “in here” who face these issues and are being tempted to choose death. What a message we have to share with one another, reminding each other that no matter how difficult the circumstances, no matter what our fears, no matter what sufferings we may have to endure—we are chosen! We belong to God. We are His children. We can trust Him. We can choose life. We can choose to uphold the value He gives to life and to defend the life of the vulnerable. We can choose life and care for those among us who are weary and burdened. We can choose life and share the forgiveness of Christ with one another when mistakes are made.

We can trust God and choose life and as we do that more and more we can let it spill over into our everyday lives. In the things we say and the things we do in our society we can have an influence upon those who would choose death to rescue them from their problems. As individual citizens of this country, we can advocate for candidates and laws that uphold the choice of life. We can share our views with our leaders in letters, emails, and public forums. We can stand in Life Chains or do sidewalk

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counseling and prayer vigils in front of abortion facilities. We can attend marches for life at the local or national level.

We can and should do all of these things and more. But even out there it is more than just being against something. It is being “For” those facing these difficult situations, walking beside them, loving them with the love of Jesus. We can support pregnancy centers and hospice centers through volunteer hours or financial gifts. We can pray for those providing such help and for those who need it so desperately. And as we share the love of Jesus, the Holy Spirit may very well give us the opportunity to share Jesus, the source of our love and concern and the true rescuer from all of our struggles.

“Choose Life!” That phrase can stir things up. What I pray this very biblical, very positive phrase will stir up, however, is our faith and our trust in God. We can make good, God-pleasing choices because we are chosen by God in Christ. No matter what choices we face, we can trust that the God who chose us will never abandon us. You are very special people, chosen people. Chosen people choose life! Chosen people can bring their influence to bear on a sin-broken world and sin-broken lives and make a positive difference!