

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany—Series A)**

**“Choose”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT**

**February 12, 2023**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is the Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy 30:

<sup>15</sup>Look! I have placed before you today the life and the good and the death and the evil, <sup>16</sup>that which I am commanding you today, to love Yahweh, your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes, and His judgements. Then you will live and multiply, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the land to which you are coming to possess it. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you do not listen, and you are driven away and bow down to other gods and you serve them, <sup>18</sup>then I declare to you today that you will surely perish, you will not lengthen your days upon the land that you are about to cross over the Jordan to come there and to possess it. <sup>19</sup>I call as witnesses against you today the heavens and the earth: The life and the death I have placed before you, the blessing and the curse. So you should choose life so that you and your offspring may live <sup>20</sup>by loving Yahweh, your God, by listening to His voice, and by clinging to Him, because He is your life and the length of your days for living upon the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them.

One of my top 5 favorite movies is the original 1984 *Ghostbusters*. In college, my roommate and I could literally pick a scene and do the dialog together almost flawlessly. At the end of the movie, as New York City is about to be destroyed by the coming of Gozer, the Ghostbusters are asked to choose the form of the Destructor. Ray Stantz, played by Dan Akroyd asks, “What do you mean choose? We don’t understand.” Bill Murray’s character, Peter Venkman, responds, “Oh, I get it! I get it. Oh! Very cute. Whatever we think of. If we think of J. Edgar Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover will appear and destroy us, okay? So, empty your heads. Empty your heads. Don’t think of anything. We’ve only got one shot at this.” Suddenly, Gozer announces that the choice had been made. Ray had thought of something from his childhood that could never possibly destroy them—the Stay Puft marshmallow man. Next thing you know, a 100-foot marshmallow man is lumbering down

the street toward them. Even something as harmless as a marshmallow company logo was employed to be the one to destroy. There was no way the Ghostbusters could have made a choice that would have been good.

If we take the fictional movie scene and apply it to our real spiritual lives, we would find that humanity is in the same situation. There is no way people can make a spiritual choice that would be good. Humanity is conceived and born without the power or ability within ourselves to choose life from God. People in their natural condition will always choose the death and the evil, just like the Ghostbusters would have always chosen a Destructor, no matter what they thought of. The reason is because of the original sin with which we are conceived and born. 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are [foolishness] to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14 ESV). Before God, every person is "thoroughly and utterly infected and corrupted by original sin, as by a spiritual leprosy. Because of this corruption and because of the fall of the first man, the human nature or person is accused or condemned by God's Law. So we are by nature the children of wrath, death, and damnation, unless we are delivered from them by Christ's merit."<sup>1</sup>

We simply cannot carry around the popular notion that people are "basically good." People basically are not! In Genesis 8:21, God Himself says that "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21 ESV). "Youth" in this text doesn't refer to what we

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 512.

might call the years of “teenage rebellion.” It’s a Hebrew word used for the early stages and years of life, including infancy. We may look sweet and innocent as babies, but we’re really corrupt with minds and hearts set on the things of the flesh and not on the things of God (Rom. 8:7) because we are incapable of choosing the life and the good in our fallen, blind, and dead spiritual situation. From conception and our birth, we were dead in our trespasses and sins, including original sin (Eph. 2:5).

As natural unbelievers in Christ, without true fear, love, and trust in God, humanity simply does not have the power within themselves to choose life from God, to choose to believe in God, or to want to have anything to do with the things of God. No matter what, we would always choose the death and the evil, the “Destructor.”

The same was true for the people of Israel to whom Moses spoke on the Plains of Moab, before they crossed the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua and began the conquest of the promised land. Moses called upon the people of Israel to renew the covenant that the Lord had made with them at Mt. Sinai. God had chosen Israel to be His covenant people—people of the promise first made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel didn’t choose the Lord any more than Abraham did. They were all fallen, sinful people, just like the rest of the world. But because of His gracious favor, the Lord chose Abraham to go from Ur of the Chaldees to the land that God would show Him. The writer to the Hebrews summarized, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that

has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore" (Heb. 11:8–12 ESV).

Because of God's gracious choice of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, the people of Israel already enjoyed the life and the good, the blessings from God which they had not merited or deserved, but the blessings which God, out of His pure grace and favor chose to give to them as those whom He called to faith and trust in Him as "your God." That's the very same situation that you and I find ourselves in.

You and I have already been chosen by God to be His covenant people, the people of His promises. The Lord Jesus says to us as He spoke to His first disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16 ESV). God chose Israel by grace to be His people, believers in the Promise of the Savior to come. God chose you by grace to be His people, believers in the Promise of the Savior who has come and who will come again in glory on the Last Day. By the Means of Grace, especially the Gospel and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God the Holy Spirit has brought you from the death of unbelief to the life of faith. The Spirit has transferred you from the kingdom of Satan, where you were held in bondage to sin and death by that tyrant, to the kingdom of Jesus Christ where you have the freedom of sins forgiven and the eternal life purchased with Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the domain of

darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13–14 ESV).

What wonderful, Gospel words to hear—God has chosen you! "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4–5 ESV). As Luther explained it for us in the *Small Catechism*, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The Lord your God has loved you with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus died on the cross for you and for me. He shed His blood for you and for me, purchasing our forgiveness and eternal life. Through faith in His death and resurrection, you and I have been made children of God. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:5–10 ESV).

We are saved by Jesus' resurrection life because we have been chosen to be children of God, believers in Jesus Christ according to God's gracious favor and not according to our merit or worthiness. As believers in Christ, the choice then is ever before you. How will you answer the exhortation to choose the life and the good by standing firm in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? God has given you the new life of faith and salvation in the Gospel. He has given you life in Christ by the power of the Spirit so that you might choose His life. But

there always remains the other option to which the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh tempt us: keep what we have by grace as we are empowered by the Spirit through the Word and Sacrament ministry of Christ's Church or throw it away and return to the condition of blind, dead enemies of God. Moses exhorted Israel to choose life. Christ Himself urges you to choose life because He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6 ESV). The apostle John writes, "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11 ESV). And St. Paul encouraged the Galatian believers, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1 ESV).

Your God empowers you by His Spirit to choose the life and the good because He has already chosen you in Christ. God has given His life in the person and work of His only Son so that you might have life in abundance and be able to be sustained in that faith and life through His Word and Sacraments until you are with Him forevermore. Equipped through Word and Sacrament, you can go forth into a world of temptation, testings, and moral imbalance fully capable of making the one right choice between two paths. You will be guided by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection to choose the life and the good as you are empowered by the Gospel to obey God's Word in Holy Scripture, follow Him by grace through faith as disciples of the Lord Jesus, and turn aside from the many voices of the devil, the world, and the flesh. So be sure of this: God in Christ chose the good for you. He chose the life for you. He empowers and equips you to choose the life and good. For "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 ESV). Amen.