

We live in such a binary world. Everything is one or zero. Digitalized life speaks to us on a daily basis, so that we think our choices are one thing or another. Those of you who are attending public schools as students or teaching, feel that all of life is now a bubble to be filled in rather than mystery to be encountered or awe to be appreciated. Our sense of choice is brittle and it could lead us to deep disquiet and unhappiness. As church we are not inured from this sense of bifurcation, this either/or, this blue or red thinking. Some of us were asked 'what should be the primary focus of the church?', would immediately jump to talk about outreach, both in the sense of sharing good news with the world, but also working toward alleviating the pain and suffering of the poor. 'We're to be faithful like Jesus', these brothers and sisters would say, 'we organize for justice, we care not about our institutional life, but about service in the name of our Lord'. Others of us would say that's the wrong choice, to be focused on justice that way. Instead, what the church exists to do is to cultivate our personal relationship with God. We're faithful, (this view would have), we concentrate on making the most beautiful music we can, keeping in our Anglican tradition, holding on firmly to the prayer book, and resisting as much change from the outside culture as possible, because **that** way lies doom. In the middle of us there may be a third contingent who would see that religion is primarily a personal matter that has some kind of societal overlap. So, for example, the Church should be about healing, whether it's addiction or child abuse, whether it's inclusion of LGBT folks who have suffered years and centuries of castigation... the Church to be a place of mediating and healing.

We long to put each other and the world in nice little categories to make the choices obvious so we don't have to

sit with much ambiguity. But that is **so** not our faith tradition. So - if you want clarity do not become a Christian – go do something else. We hear this especially today in this lesson from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is not, like, your top five favorite books necessarily, right? But it's a very critical piece – it's part of the Torah, the five books of Moses. And one of the things that is particularly interesting about today's text is that although it's put on the lips of Moses when he's getting ready to say goodbye to the children of Israel who have been wandering around in the desert 40 years - this is like his last sermon to them..., but he doesn't get to go, so he's trying to tell them all the things that they need to be doing. While that is the speaker in Deuteronomy in this text, the context in which it was written is really the Babylonian captivity. It's the people of Israel who are refugees, who have lost **everything**, who are looking back and rewriting their history in the way they wish that it had been, ok? 'Choose life or choose death' Moses says to the children of Israel, said as they're going across the river to conquest Canaan. Because your choice and your future will dictate how full your life is. Choose live - it means to love God, to walk in God's ways, to keep God's Commandments, and if you didn't get it the first triad we'll give it to you again, because this is important, right? To love God, to hear God's voice, and to cling to God. If you, Israel, are going to have meaning in your life, if you're going to have length of days, if you're going to have fullness... you will love God, you will walk in God's ways, and you will keep the commandments or cling to God. You can just hear those Babylonian Jews thinking 'I **wish** we had done that', right? And, boy honey, we **get** that, because we are **so there**, right now. On a collective level we're there as we hear books called the **sixth extinction**, and we're dealing with the ramifications of climate change, and the fact

that a third of all life on this planet is headed toward extinction at our hand. We hear it as we think about life in our county with healthcare, as we realized that the cost of the decision not to take Medicaid is leaving thousands of our brothers and sisters without insurance. And we hear this in our own life as we think about choices that we wish we had made, but failed to do. 'If only I had not started smoking when I was 12 years old and thought it would be cool - today I would not have emphysema.' 'If only I had paid attention to the fact that at the sorority parties I was getting drunk out of my mind - I would not ended up with this STD.' 'If only I had not gone after that guy because he was **so** cute - I wouldn't be living with HIV right now.' 'If only I had spent more time as a single person traveling and exploring myself - I wouldn't have settled down with this schmoie and had my dreams curtailed. We have **all** been there with choices that have limited our sense of the good life in the future. And the good news that we hear in Deuteronomy is that we are not limited to the way we told the story once. We can tell our story in new ways, we can choose differently, and that the love of God - life - is not beyond our abilities. It **is** possible for us to love God. It **is** possible for us to make choices that make for our life. We **can** choose to shut our mouths rather than spreading gossip. We **can** choose to change jobs if we're truly miserable. We **can** choose to get in a 12-step program for our debt problems or are overweight. We **can** choose to be a faithful person even though we are clouded with doubt. Choice is **always** in front of us, and Moses invites us to choose life.

Now, the reality is that icky gospel that we read this morning that is in the lectionary, no denying it, is also about Jesus inviting people to choose. Choosing the ways that lead to

fullness of life, to opportunity and justice. It comes out in interpretive frameworks that feel, and are, harsh. But it's also a way of rewriting our history and our perspective. As a Christian church we are in a time when we are sitting as refugees. It's no longer going to be the case that 'America is a Christian nation'... those days are **gone**. And some would say, thank God for that. No longer can we assume that people share our values - of justice, of dignity of every human being, of reconciliation and redemption being the most powerful thing in the world. Not everybody thinks that. And there was a time in the life of the Church when that was not so - the time before we enjoyed hegemony, the time before we were a colonial power, the time before we were the British Empire at prayer. Those. Days. Are. Gone. Those choices have been made. We get to tell a new story, a new story of choice and life. Carl Sandburg wrote a fabulous little poem that I want to share around this. He writes;

**The single, clenched, fist - lifted and ready.
Or the open and asking hand - held out and waiting.
Choose - for we meet by one or the other.**

I would invite you to consider today, choices that you're making, because it's never just one, right? It's always to love, to do, to **be**. If you're not comfortable with the choices you're making – **make new ones. That's** the gospel. May we have the courage to live into what we pray. Amen.