



September 7 – Choices

After the family bedtime routine, I go downstairs to let our dog Ollie out one last time and then sit with him on the couch for a while. Sometimes, I use it as a time of centering prayer. Other times, I turn on the TV and scroll through the free channels. I keep the tv on mute with the closed captioning on. For interviews, it makes it really easy to follow. For movies, it is a completely different experience.

When you don't have audio cues, movies are very different. We often rely on the music to tell us what is going to happen. We know, before the character does, that opening that door is a bad idea. We know that the phone call will be a difficult one. Or, sometimes we know by the music that something good is about to happen. The music gives it away. When it is on mute, you don't get many cues. If there is no dialogue, it may say something like "Ominous music playing" or "Joyful music playing." However, most of the time you are just as surprised as the character.

The book of Deuteronomy is often seen as Moses' farewell speech. In this text, Moses tells the people that there is a choice before them. You can choose life and prosperity, or death and adversity. That does not sound like a difficult choice at all. I doubt many would say, "I'll take option 2." If it were really that simple, Moses would not feel the need to voice this choice.

There is no soundtrack to tell us what we are choosing. It is like that is muted and the choice lay before us. Do we open door number 1, door number 2, or door number 3? Now it is getting a little more interesting. So, how do we know to choose life and not death, blessings and not curses? The answer is in the following of God's commandments. If we follow those, we are choosing the path of life.

God's commandments are simple, love God, love self, and love neighbor. This is the path to life and blessing. It does not mean everything will always work out great. Please don't hear me as saying that. Choosing love of God, self, and neighbor changes the way that you see the world, and can bring about the fullness of life that God intends.

To understand what love of God, self, and neighbor looks like, it may be helpful to look at the opposite of this. In the Biblical context, love is the opposite of separation. To love God is to be connected to God. The opposite is to feel yourself completely separated from God. The thought of that alone starts to feel like a form of slow death. It can feel hopeless to feel separated from God.

The same applies to yourself. If you do not stay connected with you own self and needs, you end up losing yourself in trying to please others. You strive to find self-worth through others. It leads to the opposite of life and prosperity.

When you create barriers between yourself and others, you start to turn everyone into an enemy. We see this alive and well in our culture today. Whole campaigns are build on the need to see neighbor as enemy. It becomes exhausting. Instead of building one another up, we create barriers and blame.

When phrased in terms of the opposite, suddenly the choice gets easier. The world around us would like to convince us that it is a difficult choice. How ever will we choose to live into God's commandments. This day serves as a good reminder. As we embrace the motto, God's Work, Our Hands, we put into action the very commands that lead to life and prosperity. We find ourselves connected with God as we engage in God's work in the world around us. We see ourselves as both a beloved community in Christ and a resource to the world around us. Lastly, instead of looking for differences with others, we seek to build a better world together.

"I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity...choose life. May we always be about the work of choosing love and choosing life. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt