

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Dear Christian friends:

I believe it was Jonathan Swift, best known for the book, *Gulliver's Travels*, who said, “everything old is new again”. We see that in so many ways: songs from the 30s, 40s and 50s are re-released by artists in our era. Movies are remade, although they often alter the story. I see that some old game shows are coming back to television, including *Match Game*, *Hollywood Squares* and *Tic-Tac-Dough*. Other game shows have continued in various versions over the years. One of the most popular is *Let's Make a Deal*. I haven't seen the show since Monty Hall would offer contestants cash or a box or a curtain, and the people are to choose what they think is the best deal. Sometimes the hidden prize is valuable, and sometimes it is a gag prize, virtually worthless to anyone. And at the end of the show, they had something called the big deal of the day. There were three prizes behind three curtains, and the idea was to choose which curtain had the best prize hidden behind it. But people never knew what they were getting until they had made their choice and the curtains were opened.

In our text today we see Moses in the role of Monty Hall, offering the people of Israel two choices. But the situation is quite different. He is not the host of a game show, where people can take a chance, but the results really don't matter. He is the messenger of God, speaking about a life and death matter for the people. There aren't any curtains hiding the prizes, for the choices are clearly set before the people. ***“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”***, Moses tells the people. He even tells them which prize they should choose: ***choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.***

Day by day we are called upon to make the same decision. We are called to choose between blessing or curse, between life with God and death with the devil. The choice should be obvious: we choose life with God, as we live in the newness of life that God gives us by His grace through Jesus Christ.

There is no easier decision to make than that which is set before us in our text today. If someone were to set two cars before you: one a brand new Rolls Royce; the other a broken down, rusted out junkyard special; and told you that you could have whichever car you wanted at no charge, which would you pick? If someone offered you the choice of a beautiful new home, complete with all the luxuries, or a burned out, rat-infested shack, which would you choose? The choice is so obvious, it is ridiculous. That is the sort of decision that Moses is asking us to make today. Choose life, and all the blessings that God has showered upon you and will shower upon you—not just in this world, but for all eternity. In the face of this, why would anyone choose an eternity of sorrow and suffering in the devil's prison house? The choice is obvious—we will choose life!

Actually, God has already made the choice for us. Jesus tells us: ***“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) If Christ had not come into this world to take all our sin upon Himself on the cross and to die in our place, then there would be no choice between life and death. If Christ has not risen from the dead, then there is no life for us with Him in glory. Without Christ all that the future has to offer us is an eternity of torment in hell. That is what eternal death is—not merely non-existence, but eternity without the Lord of life. Thankfully, Christ has come to set us free from sin and death and to give us life, both the life of glory that waits for us in heaven, and also the only life worth living in this world.

God chose life for us. He has given us that life as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. But God does not drag people kicking

and screaming into heaven. If we live, we live by the grace of God who forgives us and gives us life. If we spend eternity in hell, that is our choice. The Lord of Life would have us choose life, because He has done everything necessary to give us life. When Moses first spoke these words to the people of Israel, he spoke to a people who had first-hand experience of the love of God. The people of Israel had seen for themselves that God truly was the source of all their life. It was God who had blessed them with life as they travelled through the wilderness. He gave them life by providing them with the water and manna that were their sole sources of sustenance. He protected them from their enemies. He brought them safely to the land that He had promised to them. Now, as they are about to enter that land, Moses reminds them of the great love of God. He reminds them of the life they have in God and the covenant God has made with Israel because he knows that in the days ahead the people would be tempted to fall away from the God of truth and to worship the false gods of their neighbours. He warns them that if they turn away and worship other gods, they are going to lose that life and perish. Don't choose death, he tells them, but choose life. And how do we choose life? Moses says we choose life by: ***loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.*** This is life, that you live as the people you are by the grace of God. Let your life find its meaning and purpose in the Lord of Life. Live in the light of His word; seek Him in all things; trust in Him with all your heart. Then you will truly be alive.

That same choice, the choice between blessing and curse, between life and death faces us every day. In the temptations we face, we must choose what is important to us; is it God, and the life He offers, or is it the momentary pleasures of this world that matter? There are many gods that we can serve in this world: gods of money or gods of success or gods of pleasure. We can choose to enslave ourselves to sex or drugs or alcohol. Or we can choose to satisfy our own wishes and desires in all things, regardless of what God thinks. But in doing this, in turning from the life that God has called us to in His Son, Jesus Christ, we are choosing death instead of life. Who in his right mind would choose such a fate?

On this Christian Education Sunday we remember that our children and youth also face those choices. It troubles me to see the devil working so hard to lead them into the wrong choice. How often are our young confronted with the worldly view that God is not the creator of the world and the giver of life? They are overwhelmed with teachings on evolution. They are led to believe that life is in our hands, so it is all right to abort babies or to end life through medical assistance in dying. They are taught that what God created them to be doesn't matter. What they choose for themselves is all that matters. The world, misguided by the devil, chooses to give up life with God. That is a danger for our young people. We need to point them in the right direction. We need to show them the way that God has prepared for them. We need to show them the best alternative comes from God's gracious love for us.

Moses puts that alternative before us as simply and strongly as possible: Choose life! Hold fast to all that God has given to you through His Son! Choose what is good, not just for the here and now, but that which will give you blessings for all eternity. As the Spirit works in our hearts, we, who were dead in our trespasses and sins are made alive again, and given a new life by the grace of God. It is that new God-given life that enables us to choose life, as we now live as the people of God. And we choose that life as we love God, as we obey His voice and as we cling tightly to Him.

In the day to day course of our lives, we need to seek God's way and God's direction for our lives. We need to point our children in the right direction! The devil, the world and our own sinful flesh will always work to lead us to the wrong choice. We need daily prayer and devotion to keep us close to God. We need the nourishment of regular worship and bible study to help keep us in our life with God. We need to be like Jesus, and say, Lord, Your will be done in our lives. And we need to cling to Him with faithful hearts, no matter what the world might think of us. His commands should be our joy, His service should be our delight. And when God, who has given us life in His Son is the centre of our lives, then we have chosen life over death, blessing over curse, and have the joy of knowing we will spend all eternity with Him in a very blessed life.

Our lives are not a game of "Let's Make a Deal". There is nothing hidden; no better offer; no tricks. God gave you the grand prize when He called you as His own in Holy Baptism. God gives you the grand prize every time you come to the Lord's table and receive that precious body and blood given and shed for you for your forgiveness; for your life. God shows you day by day His love and mercy so that you may continue in the life you have as His dear child. Equipped, strengthen and blessed through His Word and Sacraments we go forth into a world of temptation, testings, and moral imbalance, able to make the only choice. We teach our children, showing them the way the Lord has prepared for them. What a joy it is to know the prize that is ours as we cling to Christ: forgiveness through His death, life through His resurrection and the joy of eternity in glory with Him. Knowing this, can there be any other choice? Amen.