

Our second reading will be coming from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the 5th book of the Bible and is, therefore, the 5th of the five books of Moses. These five books are commonly called the Pentateuch or sometimes the Torah.

Torah means law and this is the only book of the five which identifies itself as a record of the Law of Moses. The book begins by telling us that this book contains the words of Moses and tradition says that Moses actually wrote this book. However, most biblical scholars today assume that these words came together after Moses.

Deuteronomy is essentially the polity or laws which Moses leaves for the Israelites as they move into the Promised Land. Moses had led the people from slavery through the wilderness for many years, the Bible says 40 years, and now they are ready to enter the land that they had been promised by God.

But Moses will not be allowed to accompany the Israelites into the Promised Land. So he leaves them this long list of laws that they are to obey as they move into this land that God had promised to them and their ancestors many years before.

Some of the laws within the book of Deuteronomy we are quite familiar with. In Deuteronomy 5 we find one of the two locations for the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20 being the other location for the Ten Commandments. But the so called Ten Commandments are not the only laws found within Deuteronomy.

There are lots of other laws within the book of Deuteronomy that are specific to the Israelites as they move into the Promised Land. Laws about the types of clothes they can wear. Laws about the types of foods they can eat. Laws about the people that they can marry.

Today we are going to be reading from the third speech that Moses gives that is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. What we are reading is part of the epilogue that Moses provides to them as they begin to start a new chapter in their life.

Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Life is about making choices. Some of our choices are pretty easy to make. Paper or plastic. Sweater or sweatshirt. Dress or slacks. Interstate or highway. Some of our choices are not so easy and are a lot more important.

In our reading today Moses gives his people a choice to make. A choice to choose life or a choice to choose death. Moses condenses all of his words down into a simple mantra. Choose life or choose death. That would seem to be a simple question. Of course, the people would choose life.

But what does it mean to choose life? There are a few ways that Moses answers this question throughout the book of Deuteronomy. First, according to Moses in this book, to choose life is to choose to worship God. Worship of God is important.

Worship is not about the quality of the preacher. Worship of God is not about the quality of the music. Worship of God is not about how creative leaders can be in worship or technologically advanced. All of those aspects are important and we should all strive to give our very best in worship.

Worship is basically acknowledging that we are dependent upon God and need to consistently acknowledge the presence of God. Worship is about placing ourselves in humility before God. So to choose life, according to Moses to the Israelites, is to choose to worship God.

The second aspect of choosing life, according to Moses, is to follow the laws or the torah. Like I shared earlier, the Ten Commandments are laws which transcend the Israelites entering the Promised Land. When asked which are the most important commandments, Jesus condensed these 10 laws into two laws. Love God and love neighbor. So choosing life, according to Moses to the Israelites, is a choice to follow God's laws to love God and to love neighbor.

The third aspect of choosing life, according to Moses to the Israelites, is to be in a covenant relationship with God. God makes promises to God's people. And God is always faithful. Our responsibility is to covenant with God as well. Our responsibility is to be faithful to God and to trust God to be faithful to us.

The fourth and final aspect of the promise which is made to the Israelites concerns land. God promises the Israelites through Moses that God will provide for the Israelites a place to live and provide them with what they need to thrive.

I mentioned earlier that many scholars think that Moses did not actually write these words but that they were organized many years after the time that Moses lived. Many think that these words were recorded when the Israelites were either about to be made slaves again or were conquered and were slaves again.

Many think that these are the words of future generations who look back on a previous generation and implore their ancestors to make good choices but knowing that they will end up making bad choices instead. Many think that these words from Deuteronomy are really the words of a tribe of people looking back with twenty-twenty hindsight and who are a group of people suffering for the choices made by earlier generations.

These words could have been recorded by Moses at the time of Moses. But what if these are the words of a group of people who are looking back to the choices made by their ancestors?

What if these are the words written by people looking back with hindsight and saying, “please, make the good choice. Don’t make the wrong choices that lead to destruction.” The Israelites, however, end up making some really bad choices which wreaks havoc on future generations.

Maybe you are at a point in your life when you are faced with a really important choice. Do I keep my Mom on life support or do I take her off? Do I take my aging parents in or make arrangements for them to go to some type of nursing home facility? Do I break up a friendship in school or do I work things out with this friend?

Do I quit my current job and take a new one which entails a move or do I stay and seek to make my current situation better? Do I leave my spouse or do I stay and try to work it out? Do I speak up to the injustice that I see or do I keep my mouth shut for fear of the consequences?

Some of us are facing some pretty important decisions in our life right now. Choices that may impact us and others for many years. As you face these decisions, remember the words of Moses. Choose life.

For us, to choose life means seeking to follow God’s will and not our own.

Be faithful and be patient. Trust in the promises of God upon your life and trust in God to provide what you need.

Making important choices doesn’t mean that the choice will always be clear cut and simple. Sometimes the decisions we make are very, very cloudy. Sometimes the decisions we make are very confusing. Sometimes we make unwise decisions or shortsighted decisions.

But when you make these decisions, make them with the desire to choose life.

Make these decisions with the desire to please God and not to please ourselves.
AMEN.

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-Given: Febuary 16, 2014 in Allison Creek (York, SC)