

How many choices do you make a day? We live in a world that not only provides us with more choices than we know what to do with, but there are many things trying to influence the choices we make.

In our first reading today, we hear the voice of Moses. He is making his final speech, his last proclamation to the people before his death. His message starts in the first chapter of Deuteronomy and recounts the lives of the Hebrew people, their journey, from slaves in Egypt, across the Red Sea, the giving of the torah and the wandering in the desert.

He highlights how God has blessed the people when they were faithful and how they experienced hardship when they violated God's commands. Now as the people are about to enter the Promised Land, Moses encourages them to choose life and prosperity, to live in the covenant, to choose to follow God's commands, precepts and ordinances.

In crossing over the Jordan, Moses knew that his people would face many choices, they would experience new people in their new land – people with different cultures, different beliefs, different ways of being in community. Moses reminds the people the decisions they make are important – not only to survival, but also to their relationship with God.

Moses tells the people they have two choices, they could choose life and prosperity or death and adversity. Each person and the community needed to choose.

Moses said the way of life and prosperity would lead to living with security in the land promised to them, fertile and prosperous land, and many offspring and descendants, where all human activities were under God's divine protection. But the way of death and adversity leads to a life where human activity was devoid of divine presence. It would be paved with hardship, expulsion from the Promised Land, lack of peace and security.¹

Standing at the crossroads between life in the desert and the land of milk and honey, Moses wants the people to reflect on the choices they will make. He compels them to keep the commandments and laws of the Lord, for they are the way to life. For these laws are not just prohibitions against things that could bring harm - such as don't touch fire or don't hike in an avalanche zone. God's laws are designed to preserve and uphold the relationship between God and God's people and among the people who live under the covenant.

God's commandments and ways are not meant to restrict humanity but to bring humanity into the fullness of life for all, the laws of God are meant to set us free. For those listening to Moses not only would they recall the commandments given on mount Sinai, but also beckon the people to Love God with all their hearts, soul, and might, to walk with justice, righteousness and loving-kindness. In short, the people were being called to Live the Torah.²

The choices we make are not usually labeled 'life' and 'death'. In fact some of them may seem mighty benign. Do I set my alarm for 6:30 or 7? Do I bring my water bottle from home or buy a

¹ Feasting on the Word, Year A volume 1 epiphany 6 pg339-340

² Ibid, 340

bottle of water at the store? Do I buy organic or conventional? Do I get a tall, grande, or venti? Low fat or regular?

But, what would you think if I told you that every choice matters?

Through our choices, we can see the state of our relationship with ourselves and other people and our choices say something about our relationship with God. Our choices reveal where our priorities are. What do your choices say?

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus offers a view of life in the kingdom of God through the beatitudes, reminds the disciples of their commission to be salt and light in the world and then goes on to teach from familiar points of the Law. It can be easy to read Jesus statements 'you have heard it said' ... 'But I say to you' as contrasting or replacing the Jewish teachings with his own, especially when the introduction to this section of the text is not read...such as the lectionary reading today.

But it is important to remember that just a few verses before, Jesus himself says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the smallest stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

If you are like me reading the Ten Commandments, some of them seem attainable, especially the ones that relate to relationships among us such as not committing murder, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness.

But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expands the Law beyond concrete manifestations in the current world. He pushes us to understand the Law in terms of the Kingdom of God that he has been preaching. Jesus brings to the surface for his community the things that threaten the relationships within the community of believers.

In intensifying the law, Jesus reminds us that it is not only our outward choices that matter, our inward feelings and attitudes are just as important in living into the kingdom of God. In this passage Jesus wants his followers to understand that the effects of anger, injustice, dehumanizing others, lust and one's word not being trustworthy, violate the spirit of the law.

A spirit that seeks to guide people in living the kingdom of God. A kingdom in which life is lived abundantly, peace reigns and all are respected and beloved.

Jesus calls us to make choices that allow us to be in right relationship with each other and with God! But right relationships are not easy, especially not for us humans. We get angry, we want to get ahead even at the expense of others, we tell white lies that prevent others and ourselves from seeing the truth, we find it hard to forgive when we have been hurt, we can be selfish and lazy.

All of these actions, which come so easy for many of us, distort and destroy authentic relationships with each other and God.

I think about my own experience this week, how my choices around anger lead me not to the path of prosperity but down the road of adversity.

It all started when Mike, my husband came home for lunch on Thursday and innocently asked if there had been a dent in the car door when I drove home the night previous.

I responded that I didn't think so, and asked why. He calmly recounted how when he had gone downstairs that morning there was a big dent in the side. When I heard this I thought: well, maybe he is just exaggerating, but when I saw the dent for myself I felt my anger level rise. I focused on how someone could be so careless and inconsiderate, I fumed at the injustice of having to pay for damages that were not my fault, I was sad that my pretty blue car was not so pretty.

My negative mood continued all day and when Mike got home from work, well I had a very short temper. So when he took the full garbage bag out of the can and left it on the kitchen floor, I snapped at him about taking it out back to the bin. Later when he interrupted my reading for school with a kiss in an attempt to mend the hostility over the garbage, instead of being grateful and reciprocating the loving gesture I told him to go away – which served only to create more hurt and frustration.

That day I struggled to be the loving caring member of the kingdom that God calls me to be. I failed to keep the commandments that Jesus shared. I failed to rely on God for peace when I didn't feel it. In my anger, I sinned against God, my husband and myself.

Things could have been different for me this week had I made choices that were in line with the kingdom. Imagine how different things could have been had I chosen to focus on calming down... chosen to pray for myself and the person who damaged my vehicle... chosen to take comfort that I had not yet fixed the damage done by a shopping cart at Christmastime and so would only have to take my car to be fixed once... chosen to view the car as just an object not something to be emotionally involved with... chosen to express my feelings in a positive way to Mike, avoiding not only arguments, but distance and hurt feelings...chosen to ask God to help me take the path that leads to life and prosperity.

Anger, greed, lust and selfishness are commonplace in our world. But for us as Christians they do not have to be the ruling power. For we not only have access to God's law, which guides us to right relationships. We also have access to God's spirit and love, and when we abide in the spirit, we are aided in acting in ways that build relationships instead of destroying them.

And when we do go astray, God not only grants us forgiveness but gives us strength to seek forgiveness from those that we hurt. Though I chose a path of adversity on Thursday, God was with me, helping me to realize my mistakes and holding open the gate to the path of life.

The choices we make matter. They matter in the moment of decision and in the ripple effect afterwards. Choose the path that leads to life. Choose the path that leads to love, respect, dignity, hope. Choose the path that brings people together. For in every moment the choice between life and death is before you. Choose life.