

Lectionary C September 4, 2016 16th Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Philemon 1:1-21

Luke 14:25-33

What are the Choices Here?

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When we read the words of our Deuteronomy text we see what the right choice is: *“I place before you Life and Death, Blessing and Curse. Choose life so that you and your children will live.”*

That is what we all want—to choose life. Sometimes, though it is hard to know if we are making the right choice.

And I have another question. How do we make sense of Jesus’ words when it comes to choosing life? *“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”* Hate everyone we love, and even hate life—this doesn’t sound like Jesus at all. It is confusing to say the least. In fact, Jesus’ words are plain scary. Which is it, Jesus. Choose life or hate it?

I really think the answer and the good news in all this has to do with the cross.

I mean, in the context of what Jesus is saying here, about carrying your cross and following Jesus, what does that cross Jesus is telling us to carry mean to us? At this point in the story in Luke the crucifixion has not happened so the cross does not mean “salvation or eternal life” here. It may be leading to the crucifixion, we see that in hind sight, but the people that Jesus was talking to that day didn’t. But I’ll tell you one thing—I bet Jesus’ words made them stop in their sandals. That is exactly why Jesus said it. This is a whole new concept. It turns their world upside down.

Life isn’t just about saving your own backs. It isn’t about just looking out for number one. Could choosing life really mean sacrificing for someone else? Choosing life isn’t always easy.

This passage is about sacrifice and priorities, and those things are hard and uncomfortable, no one can deny that what Jesus is saying is a hard thing to hear, but maybe it isn’t as horrible as it sounds, in fact, maybe it is very good news.

So what are the choices here?

Carrying the cross Jesus is telling us to carry is choosing life with all its bumps and snags. Life is a good thing even or maybe I should say, especially, with its crosses. We all know about crosses.

Choosing the hard choice, the one that brings work, or sacrifice, or suffering in order improve lives, the lives of others, and our own. Parents know about choices that are difficult but for the best when it comes to the lives of their children. Where do you think the saying, “This hurts me more than it does you...” comes from? Parents know about choosing to do without something so their children can have what they need.

Those in sports know about choosing hard work and discipline in order to succeed. But what we are talking about here goes a lot deeper than hard work to achieve personal goals.

This week I came across a video that shows how one football team carried sacrifice to a whole new level. They did the cross carrying that Jesus is talking about.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ie1-vmpamg>

Cross carrying is life-changing for everyone. It is about taking risks. These young men took risks in order to give life to their friend. And their cross carrying changed their friend’s life, all their lives made a lasting effect on the whole community. And this video went viral. That means who knows how many lives were changed and blessed because of their cross carrying deed.

Some risks are harder than others. Not many of us are called to take life- taking risks like Martin Luther King Jr. did, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life standing against the Nazis in WWII. Or even like Mother Theresa who chose to live among the very poor and to love the unloveables in the world. But there are ways we are all called to go outside our comfort zone with the cross. Look at some of these examples I found right here at Grace and Peace. These are all examples of different kinds of giving or sacrifice, or cross bearing that we are called to do.

I feel it is important to repeat what I said earlier. It isn’t always clear to us which choices are the right. Sometimes we get plain confused about what is the right choice, the life-giving choice. And sometimes we may hear Jesus’ calling us to sacrifice for the sake of life but Jesus’ voice gets muffled by the voices we hear in society which stress being successful and popular, having possessions and looking out for ourselves. We don’t always have clear-cut black and white choices.

What are the choices here?

But that is why Jesus’ own cross- carrying sacrifice is such a gift to us. This is the Good News the Gospel brings us. Jesus’ own cross makes us secure in God’s love and forgiveness. You see it doesn’t matter how mixed up and unsure we are about our choices in life. It doesn’t even matter if we make a wrong choice. God’s promise of life is always here for us, Jesus made sure of that.

This promise of God’s unconditional love frees us to take risks and choose life, because, you see, we can’t get it wrong. We can stop at the one-yard line, and not go for the obvious touchdowns of this world. We can upset the norms of society to reach out to God’s children. We can make choices that turn the world upside down with life changing love. You see, the secret is this. Washed clean and secure in the waters of our baptism, we don’t depend on our own choices. It is God’s choice that matters. And God always chooses life. Amen.