

Life Sunday Sermon 2022

John 15:12-17 "God Chose You"

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Mission and Ministry, Lutherans For Life
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Christianity identifies as pro-choice, but not as we know it. The Gospel of Jesus Christ invented pro-choice, just different than typical. God votes pro-choice, albeit in a better way.

Now who doesn't want more choices? Who wouldn't want more options, more opportunities and possibilities? We've gotten accustomed to picturing choice as something we do. We've become conditioned to envisioning choice as something you do. Choose your cuisine. Choose your career. Choose your schedule, choose your significant other. Choose your ambitions, choose your attire. Choose your education, choose your possessions, choose your residence. Choose your behaviors. Choose your beliefs. You determine, decide, define yourself. Choices lie before us like we're kids in a candy shop looking at little glass cases sparkling with sweets. Choice gives liberty! Choice means living! Choice makes you master. Choice brings power and pleasure. Choice gets you salvation, it gets you heaven, right?

Then here comes Jesus. Here comes Jesus with the nutritional information. And here comes Jesus with the occupancy restrictions. You're under a master. You're governed by commandments. Choices need sources. Even the flavoring for sweets requires cultivation. The branches may reach out every which way, but they remain bound by their vine. The fattest, farthest-stretching branches remain subject to the vinedresser. Apart from me, says Jesus, you can do nothing. However many arms and fingers branches have, they still inhabit middle management, between the roots and the fruits.

There are rules. Choices can't cancel out the laws. Navigate the limits, yes, but never negate them. Only fools ignore the rules, and to their own ruin. Here comes Jesus locking the dime store door, or perhaps pointing out the door already locked all along. When you find yourself trapped, and you've only got treats to eat, no matter the number they will turn out toxic.

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The only selections left all accumulate into poisons—pretty as you please but nonetheless a prison.

You see, you can't choose your way out of death. Oh, we forgot about death. We keep forgetting about death. Death's no decision. It's destiny. It's inevitable. It comes in any color you like so long as it's black. The grave will have its day. The grave will get its way with you. No one, not even God, has ever dodged or redirected death anywhere but closer, quicker, and more vicious.

So, here's your choice: Where do you want to hurt? How do you wish to bleed today? Go ahead and savor almost endless shades of darkness. Feel free to experience all 360 degrees of circular and every direction of downward spiral. Indulge, you deserve it. Enjoy it, you're entitled. But choices aren't the medicine, friend. They're the anesthetic to a euthanasia. They're not making you snacks. They're making you snacks.

The world only offers ordering from one menu. Our assorted actions contribute to just one outcome. Choices only do what choosers use them to. To a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail. To a girl with a gun it all appears as ammunition. And our hearts wouldn't salivate so much after sugar-coated choices if they hadn't grown so sour. We've withered all acidic inside, blistered and burnt dark and hard from gorging ourselves. Yes, we self-medicate, don't we, to numb the gnawing knowledge of not having enough, not doing enough, not being enough. We will twist and whittle even the sweetest features of life into weapons with which to deaden ourselves and end each other.

We hate recalling we are creature. We can't stand any sign that we belong to something bigger. We won't abide any reminder that others or even another has rightful claim on us. We've

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gone insane filling our days with falling on grenades, diving onto the nearest one and devouring it, shell and filling, just to deny one another the delight. We're just choosing ourselves six feet under in a senseless competition for a bulkier headstone, a brighter slab of granite over our bones, and a couple additional doors on the undertaker's coach. Good for you, you've bought yourself twenty-five more minutes and a few extra flower petals on a slightly fancier casket that rots at the same rate as the economy model.

But you're not forestalling your own death any longer by facilitating someone else's. That's why even abortion and assisted suicide make such cheap imitations and poor substitutes for choice. You're just choosing yourself and the rest of us harder right into death's arms. Sure, we all have those we'd sooner flee from or feed on than feast with. The aftertaste suffocates us, though, because I'm just someone else's abortion. Probably many neighbors fancy me dispatched. And you're somebody's doctor-prescribed suicide. Maybe several others would rather you were done away with.

So prattle on about autonomy and alternatives. Chatter all day long about choice. Just don't pretend death is an elective procedure. Human nature knows no choosing except the kind that inevitably includes using and consuming fellow human beings. We beg death lend us its appetite and incisors for belittling the next guy, the next gal into un-humanity. But once we've invited death inside, do you think he won't recall our hospitality? If the neighbor's life hasn't been enough to sustain us, do you really think it'll suffice to satisfy death? We've taught him the taste for humankind and located ourselves right beside his gaping gullet. Don't you figure he'll stick around for the second course?

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Choice away! Pick the color, the caliber, the count, the velocity, the trajectory of the bullets. They'll all still break the skin and bust you open. Give sin a different name and paint wickedness to resemble something else. Weave evil to a feel that suits you and sever selfishness into whatever intervals seem best. They'll always fit just perfect to hang you. Snip the red wire, the blue one, the green, or the yellow, the timer only ticks quicker.

Unless freedom of choice gets displaced. A trade awaits us yet: freedom for faith. The choice you're looking for isn't freedom of choice at all but freedom from choice. The choice we want, the one we deeply long for, is not to do choice but instead to be choice. The choice we desperately need is not choosing but rather chosen. To go on, for survival, we need freedom to trust and to rest. To get through, for salvation, we need freedom to receive and to live. So God chose you. God knows and God chose you. God chose you. Does that change anything? Doesn't it change everything! No, not my body, not my choice, but His own! The choice you can't make, the one that ethically and eternally matters, that's the choice you don't have to make.

The Almighty Maker has already chosen you into existence. We've entered life like a shop of chocolates, and you don't have to play the lad that splurges or the gal who ingests. You get to just glisten as the glass-encased pastries. Behold how your body proves it. Creation's Wise Designer knit you intricately and meticulously together in mother's belly. He has constantly helped you along and held you together, sustained and surrounded with all you need and more than you could ever ask or even imagine.

Your next breath has the Lord God's, "Let there be!" He wants you. You're not accident or afterthought. You're special. Your every blink has His, "Make it so!" He intends you. You're

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not joke or mistake. You're precious. Your each heartbeat has His, "This one's mine!" He loves you. You're not overlooked or abandoned. You're priceless. You are chosen.

The Heavenly Father keeps choosing you with forgiveness. He locks Himself Christ-wise inside this confectionery with us and for our good. Look how His body proclaims it. Jesus became incarnate as embryo, fetus and teenager, infant and adult. In this way He consecrates humankind of all ages, appearances, and abilities. The Good Lord comes close in skin and bone, the same as ours. He remains near with muscle and blood like we have. He humbly bears these sicknesses and gently carries these sorrows of ours. Jesus has crucifix-ed God on you, ever the servant and once-for-all sacrifice.

This Savior takes the hit, takes the heat. Jesus substitutes in your place, stomachs the traumatic punishment we deserve. Jesus Christ swallows the toxic consequences of our disobedience. Lord Jesus Christ reckons His perfection to your credit. He justifies you in spite of your shortcomings. You're not coincidence or side-effect. You're in a family. He unconditionally accepts you amidst your sins. You're not requirement or even request. You're with a fellowship. He treasures you notwithstanding your crimes. You're not forsaken or forgotten. You're a future. You are chosen.

And the Universe's Ruler will continue to choose you for making a difference. Reality's Lord does not desert you to choices but encircles you with gifts and privileges. See how our neighbors' bodies portray it. Each one provides sign and reminder He has left us neither alone nor idle. In a ceaseless succession of life, His resurrection yields its sweet fruit in every new birth, in every additional acquaintance, in every further encounter. Lord Jesus means to connect forever and all over to our entire race. Holy Spirit temples these frames, these fleshs, these

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lives. He occupies both us and them in, with, and under tangible water, three-dimensional wafer, palpable wine, physical Word. Almighty God reaches out through relationships, neighbors made sisters and brothers.

He makes contact with you through them. He takes hold of them through you. He dishes out not choices but charges, an invitation and a commission. Live together. Love one another. Give, serve, save, and have. He dignifies us out of wickedness and wrongs. We're not tolerated or tentative. We're the Lord's own. He sanctifies us into blessing and celebration. We're not irritant or annoyance. We're Christ's inheritance. He purposes us elevated and exalted. We're not hand-me-down or half-hearted. We're God's enjoyment. We are chosen.

God votes this kind of pro-choice. The Gospel of Jesus Christ invented this sort of pro-choice. Christianity identifies as this type of pro-choice. And it sweetens every situation. God chose you to embody the sanctity of life. God chose you to announce the sanctity of life as more than popular opinion or political controversy. God chose you to enact the sanctity of life as better than personal choice. God chose you to intervene in the surprise pregnancies. God chose you to get involved in the terminal diagnoses. God chose you to declare and demonstrate how He creates, redeems, and calls every human life as His own precious treasure from fertilization to forever. God chose you to proclaim courage and hope for the endangered embryo and elderly neighbors. God chose you to put compassion and joy into practice for the impaired and completely incapacitated persons. God chose you to deliver pardon and peace in His gracious forgiveness of those who have participated in abortion, assisted suicide, and other violences against life. God chose you to speak truth that changes hearts. God chose you to show love that saves lives.

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And God chose us as Lutherans For Life. God chose this ministry to receive these delights with you. God chose this mission to carry these crosses with you. God chose this message to motivate and educate and activate our people. God chose us to accompany your congregations. God chose us to assist you in communities. God chose us to amplify you among the culture and across the country. God chose us for you to learn, join, donate, volunteer, rejoice. Because His is the only choice that liberates us from labor and from blame. His is the only choice that frees us from failure and releases us from restraints. Jesus Christ's choice is the only one that delivers from death. Lord God Almighty's choice is the only one that we ever really have, and the only choice we ever need. Amen.