

Life Sunday 2023

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 “Choose Life: Be a Blessed Blessing for Others”

Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, Executive Director, Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty
lutheransforlife.org

“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings, and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him”
(Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

CHRIST IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED, AND HE MAKES ABUNDANT LIFE
POSSIBLE FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE, HALLELUJAH!

CHOOSE LIFE? RECEIVE GOD’S BLESSINGS? WHO WOULDN’T DO THAT?

There was a story told of a man who got lost in the desert. After wandering around for a long time, his throat became very dry. And just about the time that he thought that he couldn’t take another step, just then, he saw a little shack off in the distance. Could there be water out here in the middle of nowhere? What an incredible stroke of luck.

He made his way over to the shack, and yes, there was water! But things weren’t exactly as he had hoped. Inside the shack, he found a small jug of water, right next to a water pump, along with a note. The note read: “Pour ALL the water into the top of the pump to prime it. If you do this, you will get all the water you need.” What a dilemma. Choose the water on the note’s terms and receive the abundance which the note promised, enough for the moment and enough for the journey ahead. Choose to drink the jug of water alone? That would be enough merely for the moment and nothing else.

After thinking about it, the man decided to risk it. He poured the entire jug into the pump and began to work the handle. At first nothing happened, and he got a little nervous. Was the note a cruel joke played on him in the midst of his misery? He pumped even harder, and then suddenly, as if to calm his fears, water started gushing forth. So much water came out that he

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drank all he wanted, took a shower, and filled all the containers he could find. He had resisted the temptation toward momentary satisfaction, he trusted the note, and he received all the water he needed and more. Now the note also said: “After you have finished, please refill the jug for the next traveler.” The overjoyed man refilled the jug and added to the note: “Please, trust me on this. Prime the pump, it works!”

“Trust the note. Prime the pump, it works.” Well, our text for today would say, trust the “Deuteronomy 30 note” from God about life and death... because His Word works, and your life depends on it. In the world today, people are still “hellbent” on doing things alone, on their own terms, neglecting, even despising God’s direction to the contrary...Moses lays out “the note” that truly matters, one which is not just water for a journey through the desert but “living water” for life itself then, now, and forever. This is serious stuff. Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses. Why? Because you’re precious, because your life depends on it. This is about clearly hearing and receiving God’s fundamental truth about life - “the curses and the blessings, the wages of sin as death, and the free gift of God’s eternal life in Christ for you, for all.”

Today is not just a Sunday about the sanctity of life. Today is the day when God calls you and me to receive and live life on His terms alone. Like the children of Israel, Moses’ call to “choose life” was a wonderful opportunity to repent and turn to God to receive His blessings of grace anew. But it was also God’s call for them to be His people of life, sharing His message of life in a world mired in sin. Such is our opportunity today, too. Yes, there are deafening voices of death and destruction all around us, those who reject God’s free gift of grace. You’ll hear it in words like, “It’s my life, my money, my talent, my body, my choice, my morality, my sexuality, my right.” But haven’t we seen the destruction that follows such a defiant path? Haven’t we seen

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the heartache that comes from selfishness, the brokenness that comes from infidelity, the emptiness and loneliness emanating from a “career at all costs” mentality? To really live is not to be cogs in a secular, bureaucratic machine. And money can’t take the place of love, laughter, and relationships. Moses pleads with them, with us, to hear the joy in God’s invitation to “choose life” on His terms. The Bible reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 of the loving sacrifice needed to make life possible again for sinners like you and me, saying, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.”

So, Moses can’t be any clearer... the words of life and death, blessings and curses are set before us... in the metaphor of the jug, the pump, and the water: “Trust the note, receive and put to work what is provided because your life depends on it.” Oh, and remember to leave a jug behind with the note for the next guy. Be blessed by God? Yes! Be a blessing in His name for others? Of course. Isn’t that what life is about? Isn’t that what makes life worth living? Isn’t that what the Bible says is precious and valuable?

When it comes to the issue of “life,” it is important to know what is precious, valuable, and enduring. Would you know what that is? Is your life precious in God’s eyes? Are the lives of your loved ones precious in God’s eyes, too? Does your life have purpose? How do you know? And what if that purpose has nothing to do with your job, your status and stature in the community, or your fame and fortune, but it turns on the fulcrum of your faith relationship to God and your gracious love for those He places in your life? Is the life of the child in the womb precious in God’s eyes? Is the life of those who are older, a bit frail, “past their prime years of societal utility” precious in God’s eyes? And what if the answers to these fundamental questions are the ones that matter in eternity? Today Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses because the

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people to whom he is speaking matter to God. God wants you to take this message seriously, too, because you matter to Him.

There is a story told of a wealthy man and his son that illustrates what is most valuable in life. Both he and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They cherished the work and the sacrifice of obtaining the paintings. They marveled at the beauty the master artists created with mere brushes and colors. But, more so, they cherished the joy of being together, admiring the beauty of those great works of art in their home and the opportunities of sharing those moments with others as well. Those times with his son were precious; they meant the world to him.

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son. About a month later, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands.

He said, “Sir, you don’t know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart, and he died instantly. He often talked about you, his love for you, and your mutual love and joy for art. I’m not much of an artist, but I wanted you to have this.”

At that moment, the young man held out his package. The father opened it. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality, the gleam of life in his son’s eyes. The father was drawn to the painting so much that his own eyes welled up with tears. Oh, to be together again as father and son, he would give everything for that.

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He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. “Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It’s a gift.”

The father hung the portrait over his mantle and, even though he owned many priceless works of master artists, this is the one that he showed first and foremost to anyone who visited him. In time, the father passed, and all that he had collected was put up for auction to the highest bidder. Everyone who was anyone came. Many wealthy and influential people gathered, each one excited over seeing the great paintings of the famous artists. They couldn’t wait to have an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. As the auction began, the painting of the son sat on the platform.

The auctioneer pounded his gavel. “We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?”

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, “We want to see the famous paintings, the paintings of the masters. Skip this one.”

But the auctioneer persisted, “Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?”

Another voice shouted angrily, “We didn’t come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!”

But still the auctioneer continued, “The son! Who will take the son?”

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. “I’ll give \$10 for the painting.” It was actually more than he could afford, but he remembered how precious it was to the father.

“We have \$10, who will bid \$20?”

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“Give it to him for \$10. Let us see the masters.”

“\$10 is the bid; won’t someone bid \$20?” The crowd was angry. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. “Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!”

A man sitting on the second row shouted, “Now let’s get on with the collection!”

The auctioneer laid down his gavel, “I’m sorry, the auction is over. It was the will of the father that the man who took the son gets everything!”

Choose life? Yes. Or better, receive the Lord “who is your life”? Absolutely. Wow! It is God who makes a way for us to receive and share His life. The New Testament says it even more clearly, when the one who is “greater than Moses” says, “I am the way the truth and the life” (John 14:6), one who has come to give life abundantly to all who believe (John 10:10). Choose life? Receive Christ as Lord and Savior? Be blessed? YES! And live that life of blessing as a conduit of God’s grace to others? Absolutely yes... because that’s what LIFE is all about!

Some of you might be thinking, “But pastor, you don’t know what I’ve done. God could never forgive me, let alone use me.” If that’s you, hear me clearly: Life Sunday is Grace Sunday. This is God’s “LIFE SUNDAY,” not only the Church’s. This is His message on His terms through the person and work of His Son Jesus FOR YOU. In fact, the Church consists of repentant-believers, graced-receivers of His message of LIFE. Sin doesn’t disqualify us from His gift of life, unrepentance does. Struggle doesn’t prohibit us from receiving and sharing God’s message of life, for even the faith to receive this life is God’s gift through His Word and His sacraments. If God could forgive Moses, He can forgive you. If God could forgive the children of Israel, then God can forgive you. Just open the Old Testament sometime and see the people

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whom God loved and forgave, the people through whom He extended His love and forgiveness to others. You’ll be amazed at how much they are just like us.

So, LIFE SUNDAY isn’t just about pushing back against our culture’s obsession with abortion, libertinism, and death. It’s that. But more so, it’s about repentantly receiving the life-giving message from God by grace through faith and living a “pro-life” life as Christ’s blessing to others. Moses is indeed standing at the PRECIPICE OF PROMISE with his people. And there, he tells the people of Israel of the opportunity to put their faith in God and not in themselves. He tells them of God’s power to settle them in the “land flowing with milk and honey” because He is the God who saves His people and fashions them for a life of grace-filled love for others. St. Paul says it this way in Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The opportunity for life, this side of heaven, is to revel in God’s grace in life and to daily take up the challenge of being His, spirit-empowered, workmanship of love and kindness to others. Now is the time to call our culture back to the sanctity and the sanity of life on God’s terms. So, if you find yourself on the precipice, questioning what matters, now is YOUR TIME BY THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT to choose life. If you find yourself amongst the brokenness of this life, now is YOUR TIME to put God’s gift of life to work to heal, to bless, to reconcile. If you find yourself confronted by a culture hellbent on wasting, even despising, God’s eternal life for them, now is YOUR TIME to be a blessing, to be an invitation to life on God’s terms for them, too. Incredibly, St. Paul reminds what it means to be “alive in Christ” in this world, “(For)

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we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

Choose life? Yes! By grace, through faith, in HIM alone. And be a blessed blessing in Him for others. You’ll be glad you did, and so will those whom you love. AMEN.