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### **Choosing Life**

Labor Day weekend marks to end of the summer season, and with it the pace of the church schedule quickens as we resume Sunday School and our choirs next week and begin offering programing for the year. We will gather next Sunday right after the two services to hear a report from the feasibility study on Harris Hall. Our Senior Warden will outline the Vestry's recommendations. It's time to move forward.

And with Labor Day upon on, we are entering the final two months of this election cycle. Finally. Many of us are ready for the campaign to be over. Especially *this* campaign.

Even if and when people get discouraged and cynical about politics and elections – many will ask themselves if their vote matters. I believe it does. Our system is far from perfect. Candidates are flawed. But people should not sit out this or any election. I think of our companion parish in Cuba, whose people would jump at the chance to vote in a real election that gives them a voice and help shape their future. Such are both the responsibilities and burdens of living in this country.

So much for my civic minded introductions in today's message.

Democracy, as we know it today in America, is worlds away from world of Moses and Jesus, when prophets, pharaohs, kings and emperors help power. Yet the idea of choosing was built into the fabric of faith in God.

For Moses, he had led the people only so far and knew that he would not see their future. He attempted to lie out the options before them.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16: See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

But, and there is always a but, v.17 But if your heart turns away and you do not hear," but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them" then your life will be a ruin. No Promised Land. Problems for you and your family as far as the eye can see.

A clear set of choices: life, God, blesses vs. ruin, false gods and death. As the late great prophet Yogi Berra once said: "When you come to a fork in the road, just take it." I vote then for the first option: I choose life, God and blessings.

Then how do get from Moses to Jesus?

How do we go from – “choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days” -- to Jesus saying to the crowd: Luke 14: “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.” “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Jesus, who is attracting crowds and offers the most Jesus sounding call ever, where the choices are laid out in radically different terms. Gone is the promise of big families and blessings. “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

I saw a T-Shirt last week with a picture of Jesus on the front with the words: “I didn’t say that.” But he did say these things. He went there. About hating one’s family and life itself. About giving it all away.

It feels less like a fork in the road and more like getting pushed to the edge of the cliff and asked to jump with no safely net. Perhaps that’s the point.

Some have said that Jesus was just trying to see if the crowds were really there for him or, like many of today’s political rallies, just there for the show. Prophets, after all, often attract the curious and the joiners. His words are so disruptive and challenging that in times the crowds would probably thin out.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor who was murdered for standing up against the Nazis, said this: “To follow Jesus gives us no intelligible program for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after. The disciples leave everything they have. They burn their boats and go ahead. They are dragged out of their relative security into a life of absolute insecurity.”

You and I are not Moses. We are not Peter, James, Mary and Paul. We are not fighting the Nazis. We are going to work and school. Raising kids and visiting grandkids. Going to more doctors’ appointments than we wished we were. Hanging onto memories. Coming to church. Living life one day at a time. Yet even in our seeming un-dramatic and ordinary lives, you and I still have choices to make.

This cross that Jesus wants up to carry... I wish I could tell you what it should mean for you. To me the cross is the present I cannot control and the future I cannot avoid or deny. It is pain, loss, separation and emptiness. The cross is where God gets real.

At the very least, Jesus now has our attention. So: live your life. Not an imagined and idealized life, but a real life. Not someone else's life that we think is better and more exciting than our own, but the life we are called to lead.

And then follow Jesus. Choose light over darkness, mercy over vengeance, forgiveness over revenge, love over hatred.