

# “Choosing Life Freely”

February 5, 2023  
King City UC  
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## Prayer for Illumination

Loving God, anoint us with your Holy Spirit, as we hear your Word this day. Fill us with your truth that we may walk in the ways of God and to the glory of your realm. **Amen.**

## Scripture Readings

### Deuteronomy 30:19-20

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him, for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

### Luke 5:1-5

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

This is the Word of God.  
**Thanks be to God.**

### <Children's Time>

Good morning my friend, for a few days, it's been so cold outside. And I couldn't walk properly because of the strong wind. I was like, walked like a crab, you know? Cold weather seems like a bad thing, but there is at least a good point. Can you guess what it is? That is, the lake freezes and I can go ice fishing! Look at this: this is my fishing rod. I go ice fishing to Innisfill, 30 min. driving from here, every year. I like white fish and perch in Innisfill, and I'll go check the ice tomorrow. For catching fish, anglers must know the skills, proper equipments, and effective baits. I use minnows and fishy spray to catch. I got this knowledge from every resource, like books, internets, and experienced fishermen. Fishing is fun! And sometimes fishing is hard! I know sometimes fishing is boring because you have to wait and see for a long time. And whenever I go fishing, I feel like I am sharing the joy and difficulty with Jesus' disciples, because they were fishermen too! The difference is that they were catching fish for living but me for fun. In other words, they were such a professional anglers in their times, and they must have caught a lot of fish without this rod or the artificial spray. I know they were expert.

But you know what? Really strange things happened to them: One day they failed catching fish. They tried and tried all through the night, but none of fish they caught. They were so tired and disappointed. They decided to go back home with empty hands. When they approached the shore, a guy shouted at them? "Have you caught the fish?" "No!" they replied. Then the guy shouted again, "Go deep and throw your net!" "What?! Go deep and throw the net?" they thought. They somewhat hesitated because, as an expert's point of view, there are very few fish in the deep water. Fish gathers in the shallow water. They knew that because they were professional anglers. Furthermore the guy who was shouting at them was not a

fishermen but a carpenter, named Jesus. They knew that guy. While they hesitated, one brave man who was the captain of the boat decided. "Okay, we go to deep water and throw the net, according to Jesus." "No, it's nonsense, Peter!" The fishermen resisted, but Peter was adamant and confident. "We go to deep water now!"

When they listened to and acted on Jesus, you know what?, they got a lot of fish, and the net was almost torn apart because of the weight of the fish. I'll tell you later about the rest of the story, the following story is to be continued, but one thing you need to remember today. When they listened to and followed what Jesus said, they experienced amazing things. I bless you my friend! May this amazement be with you today. Amen.

**Hymn: "Three Things I Promise" MV176 v.1**

**Three things I promise, Holy God,  
in age and youth, in life and death:  
to bless your Name, and cling to Christ,  
and listen for the Spirit's breath.**

### **<Reflection>**

We are being updated about the war between Russia and Ukraine. Besides the crime and violence of the war, we also frequently hear cruel individual violence in the world, including Canada. Violence in human society seems almost inevitable. Can we find any time or periods when the human beings were totally peaceful? We can barely find it. I also pondered the justification of human violence. Is violence OK if the violence prevents other violence? Nobody can answer it easily.

This is because, nowadays, the complexity of modern society raises the crucial questions of how Christians make authentic decisions, coping with Christian values.

Whenever we, Christians are confronted with the moments of wondering and questioning, we have to look back to Bible, the proclamation of the prophets, and the meaning of it for me, for us today. Let's take a look at Deuteronomy 30:16-19.

We usually get used to thinking that "God is good all the time" as a Gospel lyric says. We are very familiar with God who blesses us although we are sinners. Actually this image of God is partly right because the lyric focuses only on the bright side of the power of God. The true God, according to Bible, is rather somewhat different. In Deuteronomy 30:16-19, sometimes God blesses, and yet sometimes God curses. In verse 17-18, I'll read: "But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish." God is declaring that if your hearts turn away and you do not hear, then you shall perish. It sounds very different but the Bible tells us the exact same thing that you heard today. I do not want you to be threatened. Rather I want you to listen the true meaning of God's warning today. God is not the one who prepares a long curved sword to cut sinners necks but the one who is deeply patient and waiting for our loving response to God. Moses who writes Deuteronomy wanted to let the Israelites know that God is the bearer of blessings and curses.

Let's look at the first sentence of the verse 19. It is written that "I – here, 'I' means Moses – call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses." Moses affirms that God can curse Israelites as well as bless them. Like this, God

surely can bless us and apparently can curse us. The verse continues:  
Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,(.)

Everybody wants God's blessing. Nobody wants to get a curse from God. Then how can we get God's blessing? Follow God, listen to God. It's not a deal and not negotiable. Choose life. Choose life in an individual level and social level. As I told you in the very beginning of this sermon, in reality, there is no clear cut between right and wrong. But think about the difference of life and death. How big is the difference between life and death? If we approach this clear criterion, then we can start solving complicated issues in reality. The Bible invites us to this simplicity: Obey God and choose life. When Moses employs the verb "choose," it is quite different from our English usage of "choose." Moses' word is not about options but about a must. That is, the hidden meaning of "choose" is that you must choose and you cannot pass. His statement is that you must choose either life or death; you must choose either prosperity or adversity; you must choose either blessings or curses.

That words sounds quite serious: I remember one of my congregation members who followed my suggestion to read Deuteronomy. She said she couldn't read the book because it sounded so scary and serious. We are very familiar with hearing the words of blessings, but, in fact, the Bible has a lot of curse than blessings, and modern preachers are diluting or opting out the scary stories. Before making premature evaluation about the sermons in modern times, we need to understand Moses' situation: Think about Moses and the Israelites in his time. They started the covenant with God, and it was critical moment in their lives. It was so important for them to be on God's side or not. Their selection may bring blessings or cause a death problem. In front of his eyes, life and death were being displayed, so Moses' tone is always serious. They had the question of mortality. When Moses looked back, he saw that life was best for the Israelites when they were

trying to please God. Therefore the Israelites should obey God's words for their survival, not just adding some fortunate blessings.

<sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God<sup>[b]</sup> that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>1</sup>

Who else wants to choose death, adversity, and curses? We choose life and prosperity. That's why we dedicate coming to church today. But our dedication is not about forceful obedience but about voluntary and free decision of our own. For us who voluntarily dedicate ourselves to God, Moses words sound too strong: "If you choose God, then you will be blessed."

This "if clause" cliché is legit in Deuteronomy. And I'd like to compare the "if clause" that Jesus was challenged by Satan. It was my previous sermon. Satan put Jesus into three tests, and the Satan uses "if-clauses" repetitively: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down;" And as I said, just before the Satan's tests, Jesus actually heard God's voice from heaven at his baptism. "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

In other words, Jesus doesn't have to prove himself as the son of God. This is the same in our cases. Chloe, Erim and Sean don't have to prove themselves as the children of Rev. Andrew, because it is self-proving that they are my children. Only one thing they need is to respond. "Yes, Rev.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 30:16.

Andrew is my father.” It is not hard to say that however, I do not force them to declare that I am their father.

I think Moses’ “choosing life” shares the same story: It sounds too strong, and scary, and they must obey God’s word to get the divine blessings; however, as a matter of fact, the covenanting relationship between God and the Israelites are based both on God’s first unconditional love and on their voluntary and free decision.

Peter in the Gospel today has the same line. Jesus firstly came to them and chose them, and Peter didn’t just blindly obey but did make decision voluntarily and freely to throw the net in the deep water. Jesus has the plan to save and use Peter, but Jesus couldn’t force or brainwash Peter to throw the net and to follow him. And this is true when we recall Revelation chapter 3;

<sup>20</sup> Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me. <sup>2</sup>

Jesus doesn’t break into your door, but is patiently and continuously knocking your door, knocking your door until you voluntarily and freely respond.

Modern life is deteriorated by a lack of purpose. People don’t know why they live. Do we live because we have to live? What? No! We live in order to live? Then we eat something in order to eat something? We sleep in order to sleep? Logic in philosophy call this foolishness “the fallacy of begging question.” It sounds funny, but it gives some food for thoughts to reflect on

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 3:20.

our lives. Don't we live in order to live? Don't we eat in order to eat? Don't we sleep in order to sleep? Aren't we losing the meaning of life and meaning of purpose? In this respect, voluntary and free decision makings offer the true meaning of life and the purpose of it. We accept God's love and God's invitation. We opened the door, and it is an on-going invitation to enter into another door. You don't have to prove yourself as the child of God, but you are continually being asked to respond God's knocking sound. And the choice of life is an option always open to you. Blessings to you all who voluntarily respond to the call.

Pondering the word of God, let us pray silently.