

“Today’s Menu”

Old Testament: Psalm 119:1-8

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

**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, 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. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.**

**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, 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.**

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

I want to start this morning by revisiting Will Willimon’s claim from a few weeks ago. He relayed to us a theological interpretation of the disciples call story in Matthew that God put us here. First, I agree 100%. I believe firmly in the continued work of the Holy Spirit guiding us and directing us. We must give credit where credit is due. Without a nudge or push or pull from God, maybe none of us would be here. Second, I don’t think he was able to bring his interpretation full circle. Each sermon is like a meal, we must keep eating to get the benefit. Our texts the last few weeks have added to his thoughts, but what I might add specifically today, is because God put us here, it doesn’t mean we didn’t have a role to play in helping make it happen. What I mean is that God did not “beam” us all here from our beds this morning. And out of those who were here a few Sundays ago, I don’t believe those are the only one’s God tried to put here. I would say this for this morning as well.

Let’s consider the text in Deuteronomy. God put Moses and the Israelites in position to move into the Promised Land. Now it was their turn to choose and commit. In so many words, what Moses tells them is “You have come this far, and you have made choices along the way (nudged, pushed, and pulled). Keep going. Another time has come to choose; a crossroads between what is and what can be. Choose life with God, remain faithful and live that life accordingly, and be blessed by all God will do for you.”

Today, we are going to talk first about choices and then commitment, because when you make a choice commitment should be present.

One of the first things that comes to mind when I think of choice is the sign “Today’s Menu: Take it or leave it.” Do you think Moses had a tablet with this message on it for the Israelites? It probably would have saved him a few nerves. *“We will eat what God provides today because that will be good enough for us.”*

We joke in our household that when the kids ask, “What are we having for dinner?” we like to respond with something out of character to get a reaction: “Liver. Fish heads and rice.” I know some people like liver and fish heads are a delicacy in certain cultures so please excuse our choice of example. To a 6, 5, and 4-year-old, those aren’t chicken and French fries, mac and cheese, pizza, or pancakes. What we are really saying to them is “take it or leave it” because what we are having is what we are having. Will we feed you? Yes! Will it be edible? Yes! Trust us, we know what you like to eat, and we want you to eat a good meal so you will feel good and sleep well. Don’t worry so much about what is for dinner.

But seriously, there is something really special about taking or leaving what is on today’s menu. In a world full of a la carte options, value menus, buffets, convenient stores, and malls (*there is even something called the worship mall now*), everyday has become a series of choices and we have become very accustomed.

Without knowing we have an alternative option our choices would be a lot easier. If it came down to going to church or not, and there was only one church to attend in the Rivermont/ Boonsboro area, we would all figure out how to make that work. When it came down to going to the grocery store and we needed food, either we would make the one we had due or not have food. When it came to going to school, if all students fed into one school at each appropriate age, we would give all we had to that school because not going wouldn’t be an option.

In our world of opportunity, innovation, and options, where cereal and ice cream aisles make your head spin, sometimes I wish the only choice on today’s menu was take it or leave it. Culturally, it just isn’t that way. Perhaps that is why the second thing I think about with choices comes to mind.

Something else I think about with choices is something I shared with the Wednesday Night Fellowship group this past Wednesday. In my presentation of theoretical and theological research material for my doctorate of ministry on “Gospel, Culture, and the Transformation of the Church” I mentioned that the phrase “I’ll take both”, which I borrowed from the diner scene in the movie “Radio”, when Radio tells the waitress he would like both pieces of pie, has become somewhat of a token phrase for me. Right on cue when I asked Wednesday night, “Is

worship informative or transformative?”, Chad, and many others said, “I’ll take both.” True! Worship is both informative and transformative.

For that answer, and many others in life, “I’ll take both” can be a great answer: surf and turf, salt and pepper, chips and dip, song and dance, pen and paper, car and driver, spic and span. For me and my research, “I’ll take both Christian Worship and Sports.” The point of the phrase is to not have to choose because both can be good options, and each can complement the other. With these things, you get the best of both worlds. For worship and sports, it is not whether sports is a suitable substitute for worshipping God because I don’t think it is, but sports do provide an arena in life in which we should integrate and live out our transformative Christian worship principles.

It would be great if all aspects of life worked this way, but they don’t. On Wednesday night, I was forthcoming in admitting that the answer for both is not always a good one. Consider for a moment the choice between right and wrong. We can’t choose both right and wrong. Right is the correct choice. When it comes down to helping someone or passing someone in need by, how can you help if you are also passing them by. Helping them is the best choice. When you are faced with a dilemma to choose between telling the truth or lying, even the smallest of lies isn’t the same as truth. You need to tell the truth.

Today’s menu presented by Moses in Deuteronomy is as much a daily choice for us today as it was for the Israelites. I came across a quote this week that says, “When faced with two choices, simply toss a coin. It works not because it settles the question for you, but because in that brief moment when the coin is in the air, you suddenly know what you are hoping for.”

On this side of the coin: Life and blessings with God. On this side: Death and curses. “I’ll take both” is not an acceptable answer. Ready? Even before the coin goes up, do you know what you are hoping for? Sure, we do. We hope for a good life. When we are presented with the options, the choice is clear. I’ll take life with prosperity and blessing, please.

Just to be clear, our lives are not determined on a coin flip and 50/50 chance. God supplies us the way to true life 100% of the time. So, if that is what we truly hope for, our role is to make a choice and walk that way.

Making the choice is only the first step. After making the right choice of life with God, the greatest blessing and privilege we have is the honor to serve God and live life for God. For a choice to mean anything, there must be a willingness and ability to commit and follow through on the choice. We don’t just choose and then let life happen around us accordingly. In our choice of life, God empowers us with blessings so that we can, in turn, be a blessing.

As Christians, we call this discipleship, and faithful discipleship requires total commitment.

A chicken and a pig were walking down the road together. They passed a sign for a local diner advertising its breakfast special: "Ham and eggs- \$3.95!" The chicken said, "That's our whole contribution to society: breakfast food!" The pig replied, "For you, it may be a contribution. For me it's a total commitment."

Common sense reveals that some of the best things in life demand effort and prove worthy of whatever amount of time or labor is endured in their pursuit. The best relationships require work. The best businesses are built on the blood, sweat, and tears of their leaders. Somewhere along the way, Christians, and we may or may not be a part of this, have become complacent in our willingness to totally and faithfully commit to God. We have become accustomed to simply doing our part in contributing. G.K. Chesterton once said "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." (Ken Boa)

In his book *Soul Shaping*, Douglas Rumford writes "We make our commitments, then our commitments make us. Once they are chosen, many other choices follow as a matter of course." Once we commit to following Jesus, many other decisions in life must fall into line or we put into jeopardy overturning our prior commitment.

Let us make no mistake. God alone is the worthy object of our total commitment. We will be halfhearted at best if we try to play by two sets of rules and serve two masters (Luke 16:13).

Anyone remember the movie "City Slickers", with Billy Crystal as Mitch- a confused, dissatisfied man with a vague sense that life is passing him by and Jack Palance as Curly- a saddlebag with eyes? At one point in the movie, Curly asks Mitch if he would like to know the secret of life. "It's this," Curly says, holding up one finger. "The secret of life is your finger?" asks Mitch. "It's one thing," Curly replies. "The secret of life is one thing- just one thing." Something about this statement strikes a chord with Mitch. His life is a mess; he feels pulled by his obligations to his family and his desire for fulfillment at his work- torn between his need for security and his longing for excitement. Like many people, Mitch is divided. His life is about too many different things. Thus, he feels it is about nothing. He asks Curly to tell him what the one thing is, but the best Curly can do is to tell Mitch, "You have to find it for yourself."

Today's Menu is the same as yesterday's and tomorrow's: take it or leave it! It is not in black and white with quotation marks credited to Moses, but we could interpret that Moses also said, "You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequences of your choice."

If we feel like it is too late, it is not. If we feel like we can't, we can. If we feel like we have too much to do in order to get things in order, let's let God help us with organizing. If we feel like we don't deserve it, God thinks otherwise. If we think there is no way, God is providing a way. The right choice is to choose life, to commit to God, be blessed, and be a blessing to others.

Let all God's people say... Amen.