

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He did not call out, "I have set before you life and death, Lazarus, therefore choose life." Dead men cannot choose. This is a privilege reserved for the living. Yet the living struggle with this, often making the wrong choice. A man was told by his doctor that if he kept smoking, he would die. But the man was unable to choose life for himself.

When Moses told the Children of Israel, "*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil...therefore choose life,*" he was not asking them to stop smoking, but to consider their entire way of life. A way of life that would mean loving God and holding fast to Him; obeying His voice and keeping His commandments.

When confirmands kneel before God's altar on their special day, they all say, "I choose life." But soon they discover that with mom and dad not right there to guide them anymore, choosing life is a very difficult thing to do.

This is where God's children are in our text. The people have wandered through the wilderness for forty years. They are about to enter into Canaan. A new life awaits them. New challenges. And their parents would not be there to guide them through it all. For they are all dead. Only these confirmands are left to take possession of the land. Even Moses would not go with them. How are they supposed to choose life day in and day out? How are we?

When we consider the fact that our first parents, who were living in paradise, chose death over life, is it any wonder that we, who struggle with sin, have trouble making the right choice today?

We could not choose life, none of us could, except that God chose life for us in our baptism. We who were dead in our trespasses and sins, God made alive in Christ Jesus. It's not as if God wound us up like a mechanical toy and then let us go saying, "Okay now, make good life choices." We don't live apart from Him. Christ is our life. Moses told the people this very thing. "*He is your life and length of days.*" "*In Him we live, and move, and have our being.*" So why wouldn't we choose life? We're weak sinners, you and I. We make sinful choices. We give in to temptation so easily.

And does this upset us? Here's how we think. If we make a wrong turn on the highway, we can always turn around at some point and get back on track. So if we make sinful choices in life, we can always turn ourselves around at some point and get back on track.

No we can't. All we can do with our sins is to confess them. We can't make up for them. We cannot turn ourselves around. This is repentance, and this is the work of God in us.

We can return to our baptism. It's there for this reason. It stands as our reminder that Jesus went to the cross for us. He chose suffering and death for Himself so that you have life in His name. He chose for Himself the punishment we deserve for our sinful choices. And He did this with love. God forgives you, my friend. For all the sinful choices in your past, He forgives you.

That man who could not stop smoking, God forgave him too. It wasn't just smoking that was killing him at a young age. He had tried it all. Every kind of drug. Every kind of immorality. His entire life was one sinful choice after another.

I was privileged to have been given the opportunity to give him Jesus. The man wept. God could forgive him too? Yes, I assured him. Jesus died also for him. He was baptized into Christ, and a week later he died. He died with joy in his heart, confessing his Savior.

God chose life for this man. The same life He chooses for you. That life is in Jesus Christ now and always. Amen.