

**Epiphany 6 / February 16, 2020**  
**Deuteronomy 30:19**

**“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for His is your life...”**

The book of Deuteronomy is the last word of Moses to Israel before his death. The last words of Moses the law giver to the children of Israel, is a restatement of the law. The name Deuteronomy means “second law.” It is a second giving of the law, but it is to a different group of people. The people Moses addresses are the children of the adults whom the Lord brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand, by the blood of the Passover Lamb. Forty plus years had passed from the time of the Exodus to the time Moses gave the law the second time. The first generation of Israel had refused to trust the Lord to bring them safely across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. Despite the wonders they had seen, they didn’t think the Lord was up to the task. Despite the fact that the Lord had delivered them from slavery to the great super power of the ancient near east, they felt like grasshoppers in comparison to the giants they imagined inhabited the Promised Land. They would not trust and obey, so the Lord returned them to the wilderness for forty years, until that generation had passed away. In refusing to trust the Lord they chose death over life. As Israel stood again on the doorstep of the Promised Land, Moses urged their children to “choose life.”

The phrase “Choose life,” has been chosen by pro-life organizations to urge people to respect the sanctity of life in the unborn, the aged and the disabled. And we should respect life as God’s gift. Humans can make things die, but only God gives life! As the Lord and giver of life, we should honour God as the only One who has the right to decide when life comes to an end. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism explains the fifth commandment, “You shall not murder,” as meaning, “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbour in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.” My life is a gift of God, to be ended by Him only. We should choose life and honour the sanctity of life in all people, including the unborn, the aged, the disabled and ourselves.

However, the choice of which Moses speaks is not about choosing between physical life and death, although the choice we make will have an effect on our physical well-being. It is not primarily about ethics and our relations with others. The choice of which Moses speaks is first and foremost about our relationship with God, as people with whom He has made covenant. God chose Israel and made covenant with them through Moses. God chose us to believe and made covenant with us through Jesus. As people of the covenant, Moses wanted Israel and wants us to realize that God is our life; physically in creation and spiritually in the recreation that is in Christ Jesus. He gives us life in body and in spirit. He chose us in Christ Jesus, even as He chose Israel through Moses and the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made covenant with us through the blood Christ shed on the cross. He wants us to respect the life we have with Him, by worshipping Him as our only God; and by living each day in the power and promise of His love that has been expressed fully in the salvation He has prepared for all people in Christ Jesus.

Moses not only repeated the law, he re-enacted the covenant ceremony that took place four decades earlier at the foot of Mount Sinai. The words of our text are part of the ceremony to renew the covenant. He told Israel the blessings they would receive, if they chose to walk in their relationship with the Lord and be faithful to the words of the covenant. He said, “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord, being careful to do all His commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”

They wouldn't have to seek blessing, the Lord's blessing would seek and find them! However, if they chose not to walk in their relationship with the Lord and chose not to be faithful to the words of the covenant, they would bring a curse upon themselves. Moses said, "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth." He really wanted to impress upon the people's minds the importance of their relationship with God and the necessity of living in that relationship, after they took possession of the Promised Land. As people of the covenant God has made new in the blood of Jesus, we too need to take Moses' words to heart, walk in our covenant relationship with the Lord and be faithful to the commands of Jesus our Saviour.

What Moses told them was of the utmost importance. It was more than a matter of blessing or curse. It was a matter of death or life! But what he was commanding them was not impossible, they would do it by the power of the Lord's word. A few verses prior to our text Moses said, "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off... But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." We live with the Lord in the covenant He made new in Christ Jesus, by the power of His word. We walk with the Lord in obedience to the words of the New Covenant, by the power of His word. Moses ended his sermon in chapter 32 saying to them long ago and to us today, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." To choose life is to choose to walk with the Lord, seeking His strength in the power and promise of His word.

We choose life, by living each day in the covenant God made new in the blood Jesus shed on the cross. God called us into His covenant through the word of the gospel, the good news of forgiveness offered for all to receive through faith in Jesus. We enter into the covenant through baptism! The children of Israel entered into covenant with God through circumcision; males by receiving circumcision, females by their family relationship with a father who was circumcised. All people, female and male enter into covenant relationship with God through baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul writes in Colossians chapter two, "In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead." God chose us to receive the blessings of the new covenant, by baptizing us into the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. We chose life by remembering the power and promise of our baptism; returning to it daily in repentance; praising God for the ever flowing river of forgiveness He blesses us with through our baptism.

We live in the covenant God has made new in Christ Jesus, to which He has called us by the gospel and in which He has chosen us in baptism, by receiving its blessings and benefits in Holy Communion. The first thing the children of Israel did after God made covenant with them through Moses at Mount Sinai was have a banquet. In Exodus 24 it says, "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And He did not lay His hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God and they ate and drank." The Lord did not lay His hand on them, because He had covered their sin through the blood of the covenant, by which Moses sealed them in relationship with God.

They ate and drank in God's presence in peace. The Lord covers our sin in the fullest sense through the blood of Jesus, by which He sealed the new covenant between God and all who believe. Jesus invites us to eat, drink and receive the blessings of the new covenant in forgiveness, mercy and peace in the Holy Supper of His body and blood. As often as we eat of His body and drink of His blood for the forgiveness of sin, we chose life!

Moses cried out, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore chose life that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him, for He is your life..." Israel had a choice, because the Lord first chose them, set His love on them and made covenant with them. Moses began his last words to Israel, saying in chapter seven, "The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession...It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you...but it is because the Lord loves you..." If they would abide in the Lord and the power and promise of His love, the Lord would abide with them and they would live.

God has set His love on us and made covenant with us through the blood Jesus shed on the cross, for the forgiveness of sin. He has called us through the gospel, chosen us in baptism to be His children, so we may receive the benefits of His blessing in Christ Jesus. St. Peter wrote of the church saying, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." When we abide in Christ we are choosing life! Jesus said, "I am the vine. You are the branches. Abide in me and I will abide in you." Jesus calls us to choose life, by abiding in His love expressed in the promise of our baptism. Jesus calls us to choose life, by receiving the blessing of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the sacrament of His Holy body and precious blood. Jesus calls us to choose life by turning to the words of Holy Scripture, through which He calls us to Himself, saying, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." When we come to Him, we chose life! He is our life!

God bless us always to treasure Christ in our hearts as Saviour and to honour Him in our lives as Lord. Amen