



Feb 22: It's Not Too Late to Choose Life | Deuteronomy 30:(11-14) 15-20

Okay, this is embarrassing and please do not hold this against me.

About seventeen years ago, I went through a season where I watched Mixed Martial Arts cage fighting.

It's ironic, because years earlier I had stopped watching boxing because I thought boxing was too violent. But one afternoon I was flipping thru channels, and in the same moment I registered this was, ugh, boxing...one of the guys kicked the other.

Shocked and intrigued I thought, "Since when can you kick someone in boxing?"

And that was the beginning of my passion for mixed martial arts.

During that time, a fighter named Brock Lesnar dominated the ring at 6 foot 3 inches and 287 pounds. In my mind, he was the scariest looking human I had ever seen, followed his career.

But over time, tracking with Lesnar, I began to notice something. I noticed the fruit this decision was producing in me. I was constantly keyed up. Tense. Restless. My inner life felt like an octagon — braced for impact.

Peace at some point had quietly packed up and left and stayed gone.

After plenty of rationalizing — "It's just entertainment, they are exceptional athletes..." — I finally admitted to myself it wasn't good for my soul.

So, I stopped.

And surprise — peace returned.

Because we know, every decision produces fruit. Every choice shapes and forms us and also impacts others. There is no neutral ground in the soul.

We can pretend we don't know this or ignore it, but we know it is there, at work in our lives.

Our text this morning places before us that same need to choose, placing before us a choice — not one so easy as about entertainment options, but between life and death.

Deuteronomy 30 is not written to people who have never failed. It is written to people who have already wandered. Already disobeyed. Already experienced consequences of their choices.

And God says: Return to me. Choose life.

Deuteronomy 30 presents a decisive call to covenant renewal, recommitment. Deuteronomy describes how, after experiencing exile for disobedience, Israel can return to the Lord with all their heart.

In this chapter, God promises LIFE, restoration, and circumcision of the heart—an inner transformation. And the good news, this command is not distant or unattainable.

Moses sets before the people abundant life or death and destruction, urging them to choose life by obeying, and holding fast to the Lord.

This passage reminds us that God and God's word are always close at hand. Sometimes we may feel that God is distant, far away, way across the cosmos. And the words of the Old Testament..."Geez, those words are thousands of years too old for me to read let alone take seriously and apply in my life, right?"

How well Moses knew the people, when he said, "What I am commanding you today is not too difficult or beyond your reach...not in heaven, not across the sea. No, it is very near...in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it."

Moses is reminding us that God's will for them is not hidden in some mystical realm requiring heroic saints fighting spiritual battles or a special key to unlock truth.

We do not need superpowers like Captain America or the Hulk to know God.

No superhuman efforts needed to climb into heaven. No crossing oceans. No secret knowledge. In ancient Near Eastern religion, divine knowledge was often only mediated by elites—priests, prophets, or kings.

But Moses SMASHES that model to smithereens.

Moses' point...God is accessible to each and every one of us. To the young, to the aging, to the confused, and to the returning. God is near, very near, always near.

Not abstractly near. Not near based on our efforts.

Near in two very concrete ways. Moses says the word is in your mouth and in your heart. Meaning it has been taken in, embraced, internalized and affecting our desires and our wills.

Doesn't that sound strangely familiar...our baptism and our communion practice? Two way we immerse ourselves into Jesus and receive Jesus.

Jesus has given us a new covenant and now lives inside of us through the Holy Spirit. Obedience is not about external compliance or following a bunch of rules; it is relational alignment.

Not religion but deep relationship. Yahweh.

Again, Moses knew the people so well.

Moses warns about bowing down to other gods. The golden calf in Exodus wasn't really about rejecting God. It was about control. The people wanted a god they could see, manage, and predict.

Today we may not melt jewelry into calves. But we certainly build other gods.

Do we struggle with any of these small g “gods” that are right there and easy to see? Do we bow at any of these altars: like the god of control: micromanaging, critiquing, constant financial checking?

Or how about the gods of identity: basing sense of self off good attendance at church, political allegiance, comparing ourselves to others, or seeking social media validation?

Or bowing at the altars of the gods of avoidance: overworking, overconsumption, constant noise, looking busy.

Sure, these are not statues like the golden calf. But they are similar coping mechanisms that slowly become altars, slowly edging God out of our lives and replacing it with other seemingly harmless other things.

As God reassures us that God is always with us, how can we return to the lifegiving God and away from the gods we have created for ourselves?

Moses shared a Hebrew word “shama” which means when translated into English as to hear, to listen, or obey. In Hebrew thought...to hear and obey were not two separate things. To truly hear meant to obey.

I have noticed I shy away from using the word “obey” when I preach. Because I know it can stir up a tremendous amount of damaging shame, guilt, and performance-oriented faith.

Thankfully, last Sunday, I saw God’s heart about listening and obeying unfold in our own church’s entry way.

I was visiting with Sarah Kennedy a little bit as she was about to gather up her kids and head home.

Sarah told them to find their coats or something. I couldn’t hear because instantly they began giggling and screeching and ran away from her.

And then they both stuck their heads deep into the cushions of the two blue chairs out there, each one piling a pillow on their heads, their bottoms sticking up in the air. It was so cute! And so very human.

Sarah said, “Yep, they are pretending not to hear me.” After which she gently redirected them, again, gathered them up and headed home.

A beautiful snapshot of God’s heart for us.

An opportunity to expand our understanding to include a more relational sense of listening for God’s voice.

Maybe we could embrace Sarah’s parenting techniques into our view of our heavenly Father.

Our heavenly Father is gracious and kind and gentle and long-suffering even when we run away giggling, screeching and stuff our heads down in the cushions of shopping, traveling, eating, binge watching television...our ways we avoid and ignore God.

Our Father does not storm out or leave us. Instead, our Father stoops down, and reminds us where our coats are, helps us on with one arm and then the other and leads us home.

Throughout Scripture, God’s correction is restorative, not annihilating. In Psalm 23 we have “He leads me...”, in Isaiah “This is the way; walk in it.”

And then from the gospel of John chapter 10, “My sheep hear my voice... I know them.” The sheep follow because they know the shepherd’s voice. Not because they fear the shepherd.

How might God be trying to pull the pillow off our heads, trying to redirect us, gather us up and lead us into new faith adventures and missional work? How do we practice listening to the God who is near and loves us?

Moses emphasizes that God gives us choices (especially v. 15, 19), between life and blessings on the one hand and death, adversity and difficulties on the other.

It almost sounds like a “sacred menu”, like the 55 plus section in the Perkins menu. Perkins, yes.

Our days are filled with choices—at Perkins will it be breakfast for lunch? Or pork chops? It’s been fun getting to know you better.

We have big and small choices, including choices about our salvation, our spiritual growth and what we say, and the choices we make do affect others.

We are called to “choose life” not out of fear, guilt, or shame, but that we may live in love with God.

Although the choice is put in simple, binary terms, both Moses and God know that the people will falter as they experience physical, social, and political adversity (described, for example in Deut. 30:3-4).

All of scripture tells the story of God’s people straying from and then returning to God, and of God’s faithful calling us back to His heart, forgiving us.

The point is not that we must always choose perfectly to be blessed by God, but that God always woos and invites us to return. God always offers the hope of “choosing life” in each new moment.

As you enter into Lent, it is a season of self-examination. Here are some possible reflection questions to ask yourself. And then wait, wait for an answer from yourself. These questions might include:

Where do you feel stuck?

Where do you say, “It’s too late”?

What small “god” is offering false security, false comfort?

What would choosing life look like today?

What small surrender is God inviting?

You might wonder, “How do I know it’s God nudging me in this direction?”

I would encourage you to practice discernment and ask questions like, “Does this align with scripture?” Or talk to your Christian friends, join a small group, pick a time and space for the small still voice in your spirit to be heard.

Discernment may require us to connect with God and others in new ways.

If we choose life in ways that point to little glimpses of wholeness in our context, we participate in God's counternarrative to the death-choosing narrative around us. We are called to choose life over fear.

Choosing life rarely feels dramatic. It looks like gratitude instead of complaint. Prayer instead of panic. Silence instead of noise. Courage and engagement instead of resignation.

Small steps in the right direction.

Each small surrender realigns our hearts with the God who is very near.

God is not far away. The Lord and the Spirit are within...already on your tongue, so close you can taste it, and in your chest, in each heartbeat.

Today, again, God sets before you life and death—not to shame you, but to invite you to live in step with God. It is not too late. It is never too late.

In this moment, in this season, and in our church—choose life! Amen.

Time of Reflective:

What small surrender is God inviting you to make today?

Where might choosing life restore peace to your soul?