

Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14:25-33

Two of our scripture lessons today use urgent language to talk about our choices in the life of faith. It can sound odd or overly dramatic to us, at first. Choosing whether to obey God is a choice between life and death - holy cow! In order to follow Jesus, we have to hate all the people and things we cherish? There's nothing like laying it all on the line.

But have you ever reached a point of no return? Was there a time when it was clear that you or a loved one has a stark choice? Often they relate to choices we have about our relationships, or destructive habits like addictions or abuse. It could be brought about by anything – a job that is taking its toll on us or our family's well-being – or a chronic health concern that comes to a hard decision.

In those moments, we often come to a choice about what “life” in general, and our lives in particular, should truly be about. Does it mean being subject to abuse? Or hurting ourselves slowly? Perhaps “life” is found in another path, and a path that is not easy. It may involve struggling with temptation, or learning new habits, or negotiating difficult relationships. We try to choose and do what is best for us and for the people who we love. There are times when it is clear to us that much smaller decisions relate to the most essential things in our lives are at stake– our health and well-being, our ability to grow into who God created us to be. These are moments when we are choosing between life and death.

Today's grand language is trying to articulate the important consequences that our faith choices have. It matters who we follow as disciples, and what god or gods we worship.



It all began for us when God poured the Holy Spirit upon us at baptism. We were welcomed as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through the Christians around us, God encouraged us to grow in faith through certain practices. If it helps you to see things on paper, turn to page 228 in the front of our red hymnals. Our parents or sponsors promise to: Live with us among God's people; Bring us to the word and holy supper; Teach us the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the 10 Commandments; Give us the holy scriptures; and Nurture us in faith and prayer.

In this rite of baptism, the Holy Spirit restores us to the path of what it means to be most human – caring for one another, honoring God's sacred presence in the world, following God's word, living humble lives of service and forgiveness. Through it, Christ invites us to worship the one true God, which leads us to true and abundant life, as nothing else that we idolize can offer.

God invites us to live our new life in Christ, through centering our heart on God's grace and guidance. Through the word and the church, we are called to invest ourselves in the things that endure, the treasures that neither thief nor rust can touch. Through the word and the church, God offers to complete us and perfect us, which we simply can't do by ourselves.



These are all such wonderful offers!

Yet at some point, the new glow from baptism may wear off. Our Christian teachers have done what they can. And we have the responsibility to make more

choices for ourselves. All of a sudden we all find ourselves in a time when we're out of the habit of attending worship. We're so busy or tired that it's hard to find time to pray. And we're glad that we don't "need" to study scripture any more – even though all disciples are supposed to.

Instead, we're distracted by many other things and the lines of our worship begin to blur. On this Labor Day weekend, our nation remembers all those who work to make our society run. The flip side is that many of us fall into worshipping our careers or our jobs. When we do that, everything else in life is sacrificed in honor of our work – relationships, health, ethics, kingdom priorities. Some of us idolize our families or friends, our money or possessions. It's not that Jesus thinks that these things don't have places in our lives. Of course they do! But none of these should be the focus of our worship and ultimate honor. All of them – and the many other gods that you can imagine – appear in the larger context of our lives of faith. Relationships are a central part of how we live out our faith. Work is an important way that we live our vocation as Christians. Jesus talks about money and belongings all the time—for both should reflect our priorities as Christians.

Despite the promises that so many other things make to us, in Jesus, we are called to offer our true allegiance to God alone. We are all tempted to follow the guidance of the other gods that are around us. We are tempted to sacrifice our habits of faith in the interest of things that sound good. With those small decisions, our focus on God takes a backseat to other things. We wake up and find that our jobs or activities or dysfunctional family members are ruling our lives. That's not the vision of a full and free life that God imagines for us.

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Weird as it may be, here we find ourselves. A people who have been blessed with God's grace and love, who want to be disciples of Christ, faced with another choice. God calls "heaven and earth to witness against [us] today that [we] have, set before [us,] 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..." (*Deut. 30:19-20*) Amen.