

**All Saints. 8<sup>th</sup> September 2019, 11am**  
**Choose Life**

**Introduction:**

You can choose one of two options:

Option One is life, prosperity and blessings

Option Two is death, destruction and curses.

Unless you are in the habit of being a turkey voting for Christmas, this is surely a 'no-brainer'.

But it's not quite as simple as it sounds for choosing life means choosing God, and choosing God means loving, listening and obeying God.

Our reading from Deuteronomy presents the choice; Psalm 1 sketches out the characteristics of those blessed by God and those who are wicked in God's eyes; while Jesus in Luke's account talks about obedience to God and the cost of following Jesus.

**Our choice:**

Did you see Steven Spielberg's film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, in which Indiana Jones and his father (Sean Connery) go in search of the Holy Grail? Using the information in his father's Grail diary, Indy safely overcomes several booby traps and reaches the Grail's chamber, which is guarded by a knight. The knight has been kept alive for 700 years by the power of the Grail, which is hidden among dozens of false grails; only the true Grail grants eternal life, while a false one will kill the drinker. Donovan, who is one of the requisite 'baddies' selects a golden chalice studded with emeralds, but when he drinks from it he rapidly ages into dust, proving it to be false. The knight in a husky voice says:

‘He chose badly’. Indy selects a simple pottery cup, drinks it with no ill effect and the knight tells him that he has ‘chosen wisely’.

We want to make the right choice; to choose life and blessing. We don’t choose riches – the golden jewel encrusted cup – but rather the cup that Jesus might have used. James and John ask for power and glory in Jesus’ coming Kingdom, to which Jesus replies: ‘Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?’ It is as Jesus has already told them: To deny self, take up the cross of sacrificial love for others and follow Jesus’ example.

So, the choice is not as easy nor as obvious as it seems. To follow means to give the control of my life to Christ, to put others’ needs before my own, to have a loving attitude to everyone, and follow the way of Jesus, which is sacrificial.

### **Counting the cost:**

Sheila and I led sessions at Spring Harvest for four years in which we tried to answer questions about the Christian faith put by those who were not as yet Christians. The sessions ran every morning and evening during these Christian holiday weeks and were called ‘Agnostics Anonymous’ with the sub-title: ‘For lions who feel that they have been thrown to the Christians!’ We saw quite a number of people become Christians during these weeks, but the reaction of one person left me feeling very sad. He was a solicitor, a partner in a large law firm, and he told me at the end of five days: ‘I’ve heard all you have said and I think that you are absolutely right about the Bible and the message of the

Gospel, but I am not prepared to follow Jesus, the cost to my lifestyle is too great!'

In our Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus outlines the cost of following. If you're going to build a house, first make sure that you have enough money to complete the job; if you are a country about to go into battle, first make sure that your army is strong enough to succeed; and if you decide on a no-deal Brexit you will need to have calculated the cost to the UK economy, which may be very great.

Fairly obvious you might think, but then Jesus is speaking about discipleship, following him. You will need to put the love of God and following God's call before your own family (and maybe before your desire for political power). Hate here does not mean hate in the modern sense, but placing family and loved ones as in second place in our affections. Our first love is to be for God and his plans and purposes for our lives. It will be, as Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets: to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself (wanting the best for all of our fellow citizens).

The disciples were heading with Jesus toward Jerusalem with the feeling that they were on a victory march to see God's Kingdom established in a triumphant Jesus, but the truth would be very different as Jesus had warned them:

*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the*

*teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Then he said to them all: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:22-3)*

We have to count the cost of following. Following Jesus is not the crutch-support that is the criticism of many outside of the church. It is demanding and sacrificial.

**But there is joy in following:**

My own testimony of following God's call on my life: accepting Christ, working as a geologist, going to train as a Baptist minister, answering a call first to a church, then to a college, then to another college, and most recently to a role amongst European Baptists, has been a rich adventure that has led me to many countries and to meet many different people in many different situations. The latest is a trip to India in November, Bangalore, Vellore and Chennai to be part of a Faraday Institute, Cambridge lecture tour on Science and Faith. My part will be to speak about a Christian response to Climate Change.

This has been a rich adventure full of many experiences, some joyful, some challenging, some depressing, but throughout it all I have known God's presence, guidance, strength and peace.

Many people I have spoken with during my ministry, and in preparing women and men for ministry, tell the same story. They speak of God's call and guidance through practical events as well as through clear spiritual

direction from God's word or the prophetic words of others.

Each of us can share this joy is encouraging others to see God's call or gifting and then to use those gifts. We can speak words of love and kindness when prompted by God. I heard a story last month when I was preaching in Bunyan Meeting about Terry Waite, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy. While visiting the Lebanon in the 1980s to negotiate the release of captives, he was himself captured on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1987. Waite remained in captivity for 1,763 days, the first four years of which were spent in solitary confinement. He was finally released on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1991. He visited Bunyan Meeting after his release to tell of a postcard sent to him in captivity from someone at Brickhill Baptist in Bedford. The postcard was the iconic picture of Bunyan in his prison cell, which is one of the stained-glass windows in the church. This postcard, the only correspondence to get through to him, kept his spirits alive during captivity, knowing that others were praying for him.

We too can be aware of God prompting us to do something, which may appear very small, but which brings great joy to others.

God through Moses promised the people: *Now choose life, so that you and your children may live<sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

The writer of the Psalm promised: *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law, day and night.<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers.*

At the end of Luke's account of the Gospel we have Jesus' promise Luke 24:44-49

*Jesus He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

*<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.<sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Our call and invitation is to follow, being realistic in counting the cost, and experiencing the joy of our relationship with God in Christ.

The choice is ours.

**Intercessions:**

Choose life.

We pray for our families that each one may know the life and joy, peace and freedom that choosing to follow Jesus brings. This is the blessing and prosperity we long for.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Choose life.

We pray for our community where many struggle with fear and anxiety and some with pain and bereavement.

May each one who lives with the cloud of uncertainty choose life in Christ who makes sense of our daily circumstances and brings healing and peace as his blessings for us.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Choose life.

We pray for our world where hatred and the lust for power reigns, where the innocent are the casualties of war and the vulnerable are left to starve. We pray that you would raise up leaders who will choose to live in your way, with the wisdom for good and just governance that is found in you. May they bring your prosperity and blessing to your world and your people.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Choose life.

We pray for those who offer your life in Christ to others, for our clergy team here in the Chellington benefice, for church leaders throughout the world, and for those who serve as missionaries and agents of transformation through the various missionary societies and aid

agencies. May each one have the wisdom and the courage to challenge everyone you call them to serve with the choice of life and blessing that is only to be found in Christ.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

And for our own lives this week:

Lord of the Journey:

the road ahead is as yet unseen,  
yet the destination is clearly in sight.

*You call us to follow the mysterious path.*

The road ahead is a journey unknown,  
yet you promise we will not travel alone.

*You call us to tread the difficult path.*

The road ahead is both tiring and long,  
yet you lead us beside the still waters of rest.

*You call us to walk the beautiful path.*

The road ahead always rises to meet us,  
with the light of Christ shining always before us.

*You call us to follow your path.*

So, we choose life and blessing through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

### **Readings:**

**Deuteronomy 30:15-end; Psalm 1; Luke 14:25-33**

### **Hymns:**

**563 Praise to the holiest CD6 trk5 (Gerontius)**

**162 From heaven you came, servant King CD3 trk6**

**525 O Thou who camest from above CD5 trk21**

**41 At the name of Jesus CD1 trk14 (Camberwell)**