

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church
2368 Eggert Road, Tonawanda, NY
14150 831-1777

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 9-10, 2016

Proper IOC

"Choices"

Fr. Richard Molison

#1 (Blank Slide)

Let us pray...

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, as we are bathed in the new light of your incarnate Word, that what shines by faith in our minds may also blaze out in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

#2 Fallen Officer's Shield



Before I begin the prepared homily for today, I am moved to take a few moments to reflect upon the events of the past few days, specifically that which occurred Friday night in Dallas, Texas - the horrible tragic needless loss of five dedicated police officers. These officers were assisting peaceful law-abiding protesters in the implementation of their constitutionally given right to be there. No anger was displayed; no intolerance to order

was observed. One may have been tempted to say that what was then occurring in Dallas to be a model for other such gatherings. Then the world changed forever as the shots rang out.

What did the crowds do when the shooting began? Ran for safety, which is appropriate. But what did the police officers on the scene do? Ran **toward** the area of conflict, not fully or completely understanding the true nature of the situation at that time. These officers, without hesitation, moved into the danger zone, the conflict zone, the battle zone, and did so without regard for their own life and personal safety.

The confounding irony, the incongruity in this is that those police officers were placing their very lives on the line to protect those who were protesting against them! Five of them shot and killed.

So, what are we to do? Pray! And do! The prayer just offered contains the following: *that what shines by faith in our minds may also blaze out in our lives*. We are to shrug off the cloak of intimidation; we are to shrug off the insecurity and hesitation so often used as reasons for silence and inaction. We are called to stand up to drown out the voices that perpetuate dysfunction and disorder. We are called to put our faith to work, to make our voices heard, to make our actions seen.

Lately, there has been a huge movement of a positive and grateful attitude toward our military service members and veterans. We often see, or do ourselves, acknowledgment of their service by walking up to them, shake their hand, and say, "Thank you for your service."

I strongly believe that we owe it to our police officers this same respect. May I suggest that the next time you see a police officer, local, state, or national, currently serving or retired, to thank that person for their service, their willingness to place their lives on the line to protect our lives and constitutional rights.

(And I suggest we begin that right now. Name – please stand up. Everyone, let's thank *them for their service* of protection and safety.)

Thank you...

#3 Blank

In the context of what was just shared with you, when I read the scripture lessons for today, the words of the Old Testament lesson jumped off the page for me. It is with this lesson that I will spend with you just a few moments of time.

Today's selection from the Fifth Book of Moses commonly called Deuteronomy is a part of the third and last sermon Moses would preach to the Hebrew people of the exile. At this point in the history of Moses' ministry to the people of Israel, his ministry is drawing to a close. After all, he now is 120 years old. He knows that he will not be the one to take the Hebrew people into the Promised Land. That distinction soon will be given to Joshua. The message of Moses, though, is one of great urgency, urging the people of Israel to accept the covenant of God.

Allow me set the scene for you. You and your spouse decide that you are going to "go out" to eat. As you are driving down the street, you say, "Sweetheart, where would you like to

eat?" And she says, "I don't care, you pick". You respond with, "No, I picked last time, you choose". Sound familiar? She says, "I don't care, just pick somewhere." You say, " Ok, fine, let's go to 'so and so restaurant'". And as you pull into the lot, you hear in your right ear, "I don't like this place." As you "peel out" of the parking lot, you say, "Well then, where do you want to go?" And she says, (Are you ready for this?) "I don't care."

If you were to label a theme for the above story, "Making or not making choices"; or "Decision-making 101" re two possible choices. This is exactly the message contained in today's text from Deuteronomy: *Choices; making decisions; not riding the fence of indecision.*

Quite often, we read scripture like we make instant coffee — done in 30 seconds or less. This morning, as scripture states, let us take a moment to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what the message the Lord has for us. I invite you to follow along with me by turning to page 315 in a pew Bible, Chapter 30 of the Fifth Book of Moses, commonly called Deuteronomy.

Our Old Testament lesson reading began with verse 9. However, to understand why verse 9 begins with the term *then*, we need to go back to verse 8 of chapter 30.

Verse 8 reads: *"And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.* We, God's people, are to obey the Lord and to observe His commandments.

Here, Yahweh God places before us a well-known and well understood "IF/THEN" situation. We might even interpret what was just read as a CAUSE/EFFECT situation.

Verse 8 stated, when we obey the Lord and observe all His commandments, THEN, states verse 9:

V. 9 *"Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly...*

WILL PROSPER

Will This is not just any ole easy-to-make statement, but a promise, a promise from God! And Yahweh God does not make idle or false promises such as those we are hearing and will continue to hear this presidential election season.

Prosper — means more than just doing well; means to have some left; to have more than enough; to have more than what is needed. For a people who are living on the desert, who have very little to call their own, these words of Moses offer great hope; and great hope for you and I as well.

Back to verse 9: *...prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand...* What a promise!

#5 **WORK**

Work here does not necessarily mean physical labor, but related to accomplishments, achievements, of what has been done. And not only blessings of the work of our hands, but also....

Continuing in verse 9: ... *in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers;* Again, what a promise!

Ah, but there is a caveat, a stipulation. There are stipulations all of the above will come to pass only... Move to verse 10,

#6 IF

V. 10 *if you obey the LORD your God...*

If — Often said to be the biggest two letter word in the dictionary. "If only I had done this; only if I had done that. If denotes the making of choices; the setting of conditions and stipulations as prerequisites to... choices. What was stated in verses 9 and 10, what God promised will be realized only **if** the Lord our God is obeyed.

#7 OBEY

... *if you obey the LORD your God...*

Obey — some of the relative meanings to obey as used here may surprise you. Obey to hear, not just as noise in our ears, but to deeply understand; to give heed to; be obedient; to proclaim... the Lord your God.

And to...

#8 KEEP

...*to keep His commandments...*

Keep his commandments; keep does not always mean to hold or grasp on to. In our text, *keep* means to preserve the Lord's commandments; to maintain His commandments; to perform His commandments; to protect His commandments; to secure; to take care of His commandments. All are appropriate here, for we do want to preserve, maintain, protect and perform the Lord's commandments.

#9 STATUTES

...*and His statutes...*

Statutes — laws; ordinances; what is appointed by God for us to do

which are written...

#10 WRITTEN

Written — more than use of a stylus and tablet, but decreed; recorded; inscribed; prescribed as is a prescription for medication

... written in this book of the law, if...

All of what has been said before now comes down to this

#11 IF

if. Decision time...

if you (what?)

#12 TURN

turn to the LORD...

turn — I found the Hebrew meaning *tum* as used in this context to be quite interesting.

Turn to the Lord actually means to turn back to the Lord; to return; to bring back; to make a 180 degree turn around.

One may ask, "Turn from what to what? Turn from the ways of the world to the ways of the Lord.

And we are to...

#13 **HEART**

*... turn to the Lord your God with all your **heart***

Moses is not referring to that ticker lying in your chest. But rather Moses is referring to *what makes you tick*: your intelligence, your mind, your thoughts, your understanding.

In 1688, Benjamin Harris of Boston published the well-received 90 page *The New England Primer*, the first reading primer of the American colonies. While learning the alphabet, young students also experienced learning basic Bible truths. For example, for the letter "A", the student learned, "In ADAM'S fall, we sinned all." For the letter "B", the student learned, "Heaven to find, the Bible mind." For "C", "Christ crucified, for sinners – died."

What caught my eye, though, was what is given for the letter "H": "My Book (a reference to the Bible) "My Book and HEART – Must never part."

#14 **HEART and SOUL**

... You are to turn to the Lord with all your heart and soul ...

Soul - referring to your whole living being; your person; all that is within you that lives; with all your spiritual, emotional, and mental strength.

When questioned by a Pharisee as recorded in Matthew, chapter 22, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?", Jesus responded with "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all you mind. This is the great and foremost commandment."

So what is left for us to give? Nothing. To turn to the Lord with all your heart and soul means to turn to Him with all of your being; all of your being. This is the biggest

#15 **CHOICE**

choice one can ever make, a choice that carries with it the promise of salvation and eternal life.

#16 **CHOICE YOURS TO TAKE**

Yours to take;

#17 **CHOICE YOURS TO TAKE YOURS TO REJECT**

yours to reject.

One thing is for certain: God's salvation is not another entitlement benefit.

#18 **YOU MUST MAKE A COMMITMENT!**

You must make a commitment! A total commitment. not a luke warm, at your convenience commitment, but a total commitment.

And can you say, "Oh, this choice is too hard for me?" No, you cannot. Listen to what Moses then told the people as recorded in verse 11:

v. 11 *"For this commandment which I command..."*

#19 **COMMAND**

Command a charge; a commission; an order.

Any military personnel here today?

What happens when you disobey a direct order of a higher ranking officer?

Definite appropriate consequences; none of them pleasant.

So, who is the divine far-star general speaking here? God the Father through Moses.

And if we disobey His direct order, will there be appropriate consequences? You know there will be.

I believe we are seeing the results of this nation's disobedience in the events of the past few days.

Through Moses, Yahweh God states:

*... for this commandment which I command you today **is not too difficult.***

#20 **COMMANDMENT NOT DIFFICULT**

This command is not beyond reach; is not extraordinary; not monstrous; is not made difficult so as only to show God's power and control... None of these barriers, none of these brick walls are in our way.

... it is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

The following verses 12, 13, and 14, make reference to any attempted deflection of our responsibilities away from ourselves to others.

V. 12 *"It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'"*

V. 13 *"Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'"*

v. 14 *"But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."*

The importance of this verse is reflected in the fact that St. Paul quoted this exact same passage from Deuteronomy when he wrote the words as recorded in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 10, verses 6 to 10.

#21: (Blank)

Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" describes two roads discovered while walking in the woods. Frost knows he can only take one. Which one did he take?

Listen to the poem:

"I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverge in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

Jesus shared that narrow is the gate leading to salvation, the road less travelled by. Moving through that less travelled gate, to quote Frost, "has made all the difference.

Our forefathers designed a process of transitional leadership based upon the principles of Judeo-Christian faith. By and large, this nation has lived and continues to live these principles. From Deuteronomy, we learn that there is indeed an "IF/THEN", CAUSE/EFFECT" phenomenon God has put in place. Yahweh God said through Moses, "Love Me. Obey my commandments. **IF** you do, blessings will flow. If you do not, **THEN** strife follows." National polls strongly indicate that the citizenry are not a happy people. It is not too late to turn this condition around. Would what happened in Dallas, as well as in other cities, have occurred if this nation returned to its Judeo-Christian principles upon which it was founded?

This homily opened with the statement that our message today is about choices. The issue for the Israelites, which is the same issue for you and me, is that we are to desire salvation, that we are to desire the **blessings** of a loving God with all our hearts, and that it to be our desire to willingly and joyfully live in obedience to His Word. The choice is simple, and yet profound. The choice is easy to understand; not complicated.

#22 **CHOICE – WHICH ONE WILL IT BE?**

We have a choice to make: the dysfunctional world or salvation and eternity with the Lord. Right vs. Wrong. Truth vs. Lies. Which one will it be?