



“Choices”

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 a.m. Sunday, September 4, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 14:25-33

Grace and peace be to you from God Our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the movie *Matrix*, Laurence Fishburne holds out in his hand a blue pill and a red pill, and Neo has to make a decision which one will he take. If he takes the blue pill, the story will end and he will wake up in his bed and everything will be the way it was. If he takes the red pill he will come to an enlightenment and he will understand that the *Matrix* is just a made up world and he will be released from bondage and will be made free; and we all know what he decides, he takes the red pill and I know that because there were two more *Matrix* movies after the original one. And the other movie would have been like twenty-three minutes long.

We each have choices to make, decisions that we need to come to. I want you to think about the choices that you have to make for your future every day. Now some of these choices are quite easy. What will I have for dinner; will it be the chicken or the fish? What shirt will I wear; will it be a black short sleeve shirt or a black long-sleeved shirt? Where will I go to brunch? Some of our choices though are a little bit harder. Where will I live, in the town or out in the country? What job will I take; will I have to relocate because of it? Who will I date? Who will I marry? These are all hard choices.

Now there are a lot of factors that go into helping us make decisions on these harder choices. Some of it is our family background our families might have gone through similar issues and we're guided by the decisions that maybe parents or grandparents made. Perhaps it's life experiences. Maybe you found yourself in a similar position earlier and that helps inform you and make your decision. Sometimes it's our level of education as we're exposed to new ideas, we might be willing to engage in different harder choices that we might have to make. And if we're really honest, fear also either helps or hurts us make a hard choice, especially the fear of the unknown. We tend to be people that fit very comfortable wherever we are. And sometimes when we think about the unknown about making a decision that can be enough to make us **not** make a decision. Sometimes though the right choice is the hardest choice.

Jesus was very popular. We hear in Luke's gospel that there are large crowds that are following after him. No doubt as he went from place to place there were messengers that were sent out to the neighboring community to let them know that Jesus was on his way. People would leave the buildings that they lived in would come out to meet with him and walk with him and ask him questions. He was a teacher that was very popular with people and they wanted to know more, they wanted to be close to him. But so

often that happens, many of these were casual followers, just casual followers of a very popular teacher. And the crowds that followed him were like children looking for a hand out. They didn't understand the cost of following him. And so Jesus will have none of it, he will have none of this casual following. Life is too short and his mission is too important to be casual with it. Choices, choices will have to be made. And God doesn't want to be your fourth or fifth priority. God doesn't want you to be a drifter who isn't willing to make hard choices. Rather our God has given us faith, has given us hope to move beyond fear to trust.

To get his point across, Jesus employs a very common Middle Eastern teaching, he exaggerates. And so he says to be his disciple you must "hate," not just anybody, you must "hate" your father, your mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, even life itself! Now this is an exaggeration, it's like me saying "I would kill for those Taylor Swift tickers!" Or "If I don't get a mani or pedi this week I am just going to die." It's an exaggeration.

Or what Jesus is saying is their love for him must be so complete, so wholehearted that it even surpasses the love that they have for their family members, or even life itself. And those who are in Luke's community understood that. They would have understood this teaching very well, because they did pay the price. They did count the cost. Many of them had been shunned by their family, some had been arrested, even some martyred for the sake of their faith. They knew what it was like to carry the cross and follow him. They knew that the pathway was not an easy one and so Jesus calls each one of us to make a conscious commitment to understand that personal cost to each other. The word that he uses here "give up" literally means to turn away from or to detach from. This is nothing less than honoring that first commandment. "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods." Of recognizing that as we make priorities in our life, God wants to be at the top priority. The message translation says that verse this way: "Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you cannot be my disciple."

What Jesus is calling us into is a life of gratitude and generosity for what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross.

And stewardship when we think about what do we do with what we have, it recognizes that everything that we have is a gift from God, given in trust for us to be able to not only do the mission of God in this place, but also care for our family.

Jesus wants us to have a life that's continually focused on giving, and the wisdom of using the resources that God has entrusted to us. So the question is are we open to God's abundance and spiritual leading? We know we can't do it by ourselves, but do we believe and trust that we have a God who can do it? That is after all the crux of the difference between membership in an organization and being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The other day I saw an article in the news, it was an article about their conflict in Syria and Iraq with ISIS. They had used satellite imagery to find seventy-two different sites where Christians, Yazidees and Shiite Muslims were killed by ISIS. Over fifteen thousand or more they felt were killed. And if you follow anything about Christians in that region

of the world you will see that there is active persecution happening against Christians. They counted the cost and they are paying the price for their following Jesus. The cross of Jesus is more than just a metaphor, it's more than just a Christian symbol that we put on the top of a steeple or around our neck on a necklace. It is sacrifice, pain, death, separation. But it is also fulfillment and exultation and hope. Carrying the cross is a choice each one of us has to make, a choice that is not to be taken lightly. But it is also a choice when we gather in community in Christ, when we receive a new brother in Christ in baptism, when we take in our hands the body and blood of Jesus. It is a choice which is to be celebrated. It is a choice that can change us, it's a choice that can better alignment us with God's promises for our future.

As the psalmist said and as we heard a little bit before, "They are like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in its season and their leaves do not wither, in all they do they prosper.

Amen

In the name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2016, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org