

The text before us from the book of Deuteronomy records the farewell discourse spoken by Moses to the assembled people of Israel. For 40 years, Moses had wandered the desert with this ragtag group, but their time together was drawing to a close. Moses, who had been so faithful and had labored for so long, would be denied the honor of leading the people into God's Promised Land. It's certainly hard when things end, but it is much harder, in my mind, to know that they ended because of your failure. We all make choices and we have to live with the consequences. Moses had chosen not to trust God, and so as punishment the task of leadership passed to Joshua. Joshua would finish the journey Moses had started all those years before. If I were an artist of any kind, I would paint the biblical scene of Moses standing all by himself atop Mt. Pisgah looking out at a land he would never enter. I would try to capture his profound sadness and sorrow at seeing what he had worked so hard for, but would never get to personally enjoy. But I am not an artist, so I will have to leave it to you to paint this picture in your mind. Before Moses and the people parted company, though, he said his final goodbyes in the form of a sermon. How do you sum up close to a half a century of life together? What do you say after so many shared memories and experiences? Partly meant as a confession of what he had failed to do and partly meant as instruction to what the people should do, Moses said: "See I have set before you life and death...choose life".

Then as now, two paths are always before us in this world: one the way of life and the other the way of death; one the way of God and the other the way of the Devil; one the way of virtue and the other the way of vice; one the way of faith and the other the way of unbelief. Our lives are shaped by these two choices. Sounding a lot like a Robert Frost poem, this morning Moses calls us to choose the path less traveled by. For the path we are instructed to follow is a hard path, a narrow path, a neglected path, and because of this, it is in want of wear. This is the great ultimatum of life: God or everything else. The way of God leads to life, the way of everything else leads to death. Either it is God who illuminates our paths or we are doomed to a life of the blind leading the blind. There is no middle path. The Lord has set before us two ways and He calls us day by day to choose life. The call is irreproachable, the command is indisputable, the charge is irrevocable: choose life or choose death. But how can we possibly choose life? We can't. We can no more choose life than we can choose to be born. Life is out of our control.

This choice before us is an impossible choice because left to ourselves we will never choose the better portion. And so imbedded in Moses' stern words to the people is the pure Gospel message: We can choose life only because Life has already chosen us. For in the fullness of time, Life chose us as Life came to live and dwell amongst us full of grace and truth.

Moses spoke an ultimatum to Israel, but it was so much more than that. It was also a call for recognition. Moses pleaded with the people to stop living as if they were dead already. God had come to set them free, but the people were suffering from what today might be called Stockholm syndrome, and were pining after the false comforts of their former lives as slaves in Egypt. They failed to see their lives had worth only in and through the freedom of God. And so the Call of Moses is the same Call of Jesus: it is an everlasting call to recognize that we already have life in Him, that we too are free. But the freedom offered brings hardships. Moses knew this all too well. He knew what he was asking of the people was not going to be easy. The path to freedom is a path that requires us to abandon all we know, and all we are; we must turn our backs on our former lives and chart a new course towards the horizon of freedom. We must abandon ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Christ. Each day we are called to choose. Will we obey the voice of our Savior or will we entertain ourselves to death with the false idols of this world?

So what does a new life shaped by the life of Christ look like? We are called to think on life differently. To a Christian all life is sacred to the Lord; all life has meaning. Our lives are not accidental or incidental, but intentional. Endowed by our Creator, our lives have a heavenly purpose for we are called to make space for Christ in this world, to bear Christ to our neighbor, to be the very mask, which God wears to awaken this world from its slumber and sleep. You are Christ to your neighbor, and your voice becomes the very voice of Christ to all you come in contact with: your hands become His hands to work mercy and practice charity, your feet become His feet to travel this earth making disciples of all nations, your heart, your mind, your entire body and soul, belong to Him and are a reflection of a life that has been set free in Christ. So I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that God has set before *YOU* life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life. Amen.