

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 12, 2017

“Aprons or Bibs.”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Potluck dinners are wonderful, aren't they? We enjoy great fellowship, contagious laughter, and the comfort of being in a place where everybody knows your name. And, oh yes, the food! Delicious aromas fill us with anticipation of the glorious feast to come. Grazing and gazing at the buffet table is one of the true joys of church life. The major challenge at a church potluck is that the vast selection of tasty choices always exceeds our ability to sample each selection. There is always more than enough to pile on our plates, not just ones but twice, or even three times. There is always more than enough leftover, too, so that each one of us can take home still another meal to pop in the microwave. Some congregations even provide bibs for grazers and aprons for its servers. Wesley has aprons...

Today's Old Testament Scripture addresses the issues of choice in the religious life of God's people. Here, Moses' task has been complete. He had led God's people out of Egyptian bondage through the wilderness. The promised land was in sight. Their instruction in faith was complete. God's "buffet table" was visible just across the Jordan River. The people were ready to don their bibs. They were eager to stop gazing and begin grazing.

However, their choice was not as simple as deciding whether to select meatloaf or fried chicken. Their choice was a matter of life and death. "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."

Now that's a powerful choice and an even more powerful promise. It should also be pretty easy, a no-brainer, right? Who among us would choose curses over blessing, not just for ourselves but for our entire families for generations to come? Who among us in their right minds, would choose death over life? Naturally, we would choose life and blessings every time. After all, we shape our future by the choices we make in the present.

Let's go back to God's people in our text. Their history up to this point certainly was not filled with good life choices. They often turned away from the Lord and worshiped other gods. They were often unjust and unfair in their treatment of the poor and vulnerable. They often ignored and even openly opposed the leadership of Moses. They often experienced bitter quarreling and dissention within their midst.

Choosing life and blessing was not as easy as it looked for God's people then. Well, it is at least as difficult for us today, especially during troubled and frightening times. When the storms and challenges of life are crashing upon us from every direction, it's almost impossible to make any decision at all except to stop the train and get off. We will choose any safe place to ride out the storm safely.

Yogi Bera, retired New York Yankees catcher once said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." Which fork in the road leads home? How do we know for sure which way is the right one? How can we really know what choosing life and blessing looks like?

In our Scripture, Moses was wrapping up his final address to God's children. Here Moses looked back on their tumultuous forty-year wilderness journey and summarized faithful living as God's people in the promised land. He said, "...loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees and ordinances...obeying him and holding fast to him..." Choosing life was to be demonstrated by faithful worship, purity of lifestyle, fair treatment of the weak and vulnerable, faithful leadership, and the honoring of all creation.

Even with these specific directions, God's people would often miss the mark completely. Left to their own efforts they would deserve not life and blessing, but death and curses. In the very next chapter of Deuteronomy, the Lord tells Moses that after Moses dies, the people will begin to worship pagan gods in their midst and will forsake God by breaking the covenant they made. "...they have eaten their fill and grown fat, they will turn to other gods...despising me and breaking my covenant" (Deut.31:20).

Left on our own, we cannot follow the clear direction of God's teachings and decrees. Left on our own, life can be just one curse after another. Then we die. Left on our own, in the middle of life's cursed troubles, we gaze at folks who seem to have it all together. We long to graze at their buffet table of happiness and security. If only we could just understand the step-by-step directions to success and joy.