

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 29, 2014

"A Lesson from Dr. Seuss."

Romans 6:1-14, 20-23,

"Congratulations, today's your day. You're off to great places. You're off and away. You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." Those rhythmic words of advice come from a little book by Dr. Seuss titled 'Oh, the Places You'll Go!' He continues, "You're on your own, and you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go."

It's up to us, says Dr. Seuss. The world is ours and we are free to choose what kind of life we will have. He even gives a warning: "You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care. About some you will say, 'I don't choose to go there.' With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you're too smart to go down a not-so-good-street."

I wish that were true, don't you? I wish we only went places our brains told us to go that we always made rational choices. A pastor who was counseling a person asked him if he had trouble making decisions. The man answered, "Well, yes and no." An intelligent person is one who has learned to choose between good and evil, truth and falsehood, love and hate, gentleness and cruelty, humility and arrogance, life and death. In other words, "You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care. About some you will say, 'I don't choose to go there.'" There is a saying, "God always votes yes, the devil votes no, and your vote decides the election."

Life is about choices. That's where we want to begin today. Did you know that the human being is the only creature on earth that is not prisoner of its programming, but is the master of it? Birds are programmed to fly south in the winter. They don't suddenly decide that because of the bad economy they had better stay home this year. Beaver build dams. Fish swim in schools. Only humans decide to build a dam or go back to school. We have the power to decide. That doesn't mean, of course, that we always make good decisions.

Many of us will have to confess that there is something within us that invariably draws us toward making bad choices. Why is it that we are drawn to that which is bad for us especially when we know that making bad choices can sometimes be disastrous?

When Pompeii was being excavated, they found a woman's body. Her body had been preserved by the ashes from Mount Vesuvius as it swept over the city. This woman's feet were turned toward the city gate, toward safety but her face was turned backward. She was looking back toward something that was just beyond her outstretched hands. The archeologists wondered what she was looking for. As they dug, they found a bag of pearls. Maybe she dropped this bag of pearls as she ran for her life. Maybe someone else dropped them, and this lady saw a chance for instant wealth. But, one way or another, with her life on the line, she thought it was worthwhile to stop and pick up some pearls. She turned to pick them up and the volcanic ash swept over her.

What a terrible choice. It was a very human thing to do to reach out for the bag of pearls, but it cost her her life.

There are many choices people make and end up costing them their lives, or their families, or their health, or their peace of mind. Anything that causes you to hurt yourself or to hurt someone else is going to be a bad choice.

Some of you will remember the story of a teenage girl who was out on a date one night. Her boyfriend suggested they go to a party where there was going to be alcohol and drugs and all kinds of illicit activity. The young woman said, "No, I'm not going to that. And if you're going to do that, you can take me home." Her boyfriend said, "What's the matter? Are you afraid your Daddy will hurt you? She said, "No, I'm afraid that I will hurt my Daddy." She knew that what

her boyfriend was suggesting was a bad choice. "You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care. About some you will say, 'I don't choose to go there.'"

In today's reading from Romans, St. Paul writes, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires...for sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace."

First of all, let's acknowledge that we are sinners. Even the best of us are sinners. So, don't let the first-century imagery of being a slave or a servant get in the way of your understanding. We're in trouble if we think we're perfect. Not one of us is. Some may come close... Negative addictions can cost us our lives and all we hold dear.

We also can become addicted to positive activities in our lives. What I'm talking about is gardening, swimming, juggling, running, watching movies, reading Louis Lamour books... as long as you do not neglect other positive activities and it benefits you and those around you, positive activities are a blessing.

"You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care. About some you will say, 'I don't choose to go there.' With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you're too smart to go down a not-so-good-street." Life consists of making choices. The Bible says that we are drawn to bad choices because of our sinful nature. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can train ourselves, by God's grace, to daily make good choices.

Choosing Jesus Christ helps us make better choices. That's one reason the Christian faith has stood the test of time. When people give their lives to Jesus Christ they become better persons, they become better citizens, they live happier, more fulfilled lives. We all know it's true.

But let me say this. It happens only if you make your faith the most important part of your lives. It works only if you take your faith seriously. I'm not being judgmental here. People who only show up at church occasionally who have only a casual relationship with God are missing out on a fulfilled life. Only when Christ becomes a real presence in our lives can we master the storms.

The choice is put to us by St. Paul. He writes, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The choice couldn't be any plainer than that. Or, as Dr. Seuss puts it, "Congratulations, today's your day. You're off to great places. You're off and away. You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." With God's help, you can!