

Choose Life

1 Cor 3: 1-9, Deut 30: 15-20

Feb 16, 2020

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

1 Cor 3: 1-9

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Deut 30: 15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

"Live your life from truth and you will survive everything, everything, I believe even death. You will survive everything if you can live your life from the point of view of truth. That took me a while to get, pretending to be something I wasn't, wanting to be somebody I couldn't, but understanding deep inside myself when I was willing to listen, that my own truth and only my own truth could set me free. Turn your wounds into wisdom. You will be wounded many times in your life. You'll make mistakes. Some people will call them failures, but I have learned that failure is really God's way of saying, 'Excuse me, you're moving in the wrong direction.'"

These words from Oprah Winfrey's 1997 commencement speech at Wellesley College, like so many other commencement speeches, are words of guidance and direction for the future of the graduating class that come from a place of deep passion and conviction from the speaker. They are meant to be motivating and remembered, to remain a source of insight and inspiration long after the event is over.

For the speaker, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share with a particular group of people, at a very pivotal and momentous time in their lives, to sum up and impart their own values in ways that are profound and touch the heart.

“Put God first in everything you do. Everything that you think you see in me. Everything that I’ve accomplished, everything that you think I have – and I have a few things. Everything that I have is by the grace of God. Understand that. It’s a gift.”

These faithful, personal, passionate words were spoken by Denzel Washington to the 2015 Dillard University graduating class. His words followed an acknowledgement of some humbling life lessons that returned his feet to the ground when his career and fame began to make him see himself as the center of the universe. What he learned in a hard, painful way, was a critical, life changing, lesson that he honestly, sincerely shared with others in this extraordinary opportunity to impact the quality of their lives, and hopefully prevent them from learning as he had learned.

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. . . . I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

These words are the farewell address of Moses to the Israelites. By the grace and guidance of God, Moses had freed the Israelites from the captivity and bondage of the Egyptians, he had led them for 40 years to the Promised Land, the land they were about to enter, but without him. Moses has this one last exceptional moment to teach the people one last time; one last opportunity to remind them of the loving guidance and covenant with the Lord God, and the perils of failing to live as God commands. He succinctly, yet profoundly, offers the people an invitation to choose life, to choose to walk in God’s ways, following God’s commandments, decrees and ordinances so that they, and their descendants, will live lives of abundance, lives of quality and quantity.

Choose life. Choose life when life is good, and you are feeling blessed, happy to wake up in the morning, knowing joy and that you are loved. But also choose life when your life is hard or broken, when you are feeling hopeless, when you know sorrow, grief and despair and feel unloved or unlovable. Choose life in times of prosperity and adversity. Choose life in all of its glorious and its horrible moments. Choose life in covenant with the God who created you, who knows you, who loves you, who heals you, who walks with you, who listens to you, who cries with you, who stays with you.

This relationship is what you were made for, this is why and what you were created by God to do and to be. Do not waiver, hold on to life, hold on to the law of God as a gift of grace.

Moses specifically addressed his own people; yet each and every generation of the people of God must make the choice to choose life, or choose death, to follow the life-giving ways of God, or to follow the life-taking ways false gods. We each must ultimately see for ourselves that we are invited to be God’s servants, working together; we are God’s field, God’s building.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days.

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. This ideal, this message, is at the very heart of 'We Shall Overcome,' the anthem of the American Civil Rights and the South African Anti-Apartheid movements, the protest song of migrant farmworkers and trade unions, the encouragement in the Bangladesh war of independence and for those protesting against the communist government in Czechoslovakia and the Israeli blockade of Gaza, among many other causes.

'We Shall Overcome' is a promise and a hope for the integrity and equality of all humanity, the very same vision that God has for the world. 'We Shall Overcome' encourages both patience and persistence. It affirms that a just, peaceful, better world is possible- someday. 'We'll walk hand in hand,' 'we shall live in peace,' 'we shall all be free' and 'we are not afraid.'

When we choose life, we are loving the LORD our God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, so that we shall live and become numerous, and the LORD our God will bless us.

Yet the warning in Moses' farewell echoes here as well, keeping every generation mindful that we have a long way to go, that progress can be fragile and painfully slow, because not all of humanity chooses life. Many choose death, choosing to turn their hearts away, choosing to not hear, choosing to be led astray and to bow down to other gods and serve them.

So that indeed we may someday overcome, let us continue to choose life, let us remember the last lesson of Moses as gracefully reflected upon by songwriter Michael Jason Frost,* "Choose life, full and abundant, a precious gift from Heaven above

Life, in spite of all of its trials, is God's manifestation of his marvelous love
When it seems there's no other choice you can find,
Remember God created us to prosper and thrive,
The choice is clear this time,
Choose life.

Amen.

* Michael Jason Frost

Choose Life

(Michael Jason Frost / Morning Frost Music / BMI)