

Why do some decisions seem so difficult, and others are made with no problem at all? How often do two face the same decision and it is an easy choice for one while the other anguishes for hours or days before acting?

After forty years in the desert, the Israelites entered the Promised Land. They were tired of sand and manna and heat and excited about babbling brooks and fertile hillsides. Joshua made them sit down around a mountain, so he could talk to them as Moses had at Sinai. He said one choice would make all other decisions fall into place. He said before you decide where to live and what to do, decide who it is you will serve. Who will be your master? What will be your guiding light? To whom will you be loyal? His exact words were, "*choose this day whom you will serve.*" That might be a wonderful reminder for our own difficult choices.

Making a choice only begins a journey. It doesn't change the journey but determines how it will be undertaken. It is merely the first step that will guide one's path. When I was a child and Dad reminded me to do my chores, I always said I would, but often didn't if there was something I felt was more important to me. Sometimes my love for parents guided my choices and sometimes my love for me was the god I followed. I always said I would do my chores, but often I changed my mind and came up with excuses not to follow through. Had my daily choice been guided by God's love, I certainly would have taken many different paths than I did.

Marriage vows promise oneness until death, but arguments or distractions can cause such vows to be forgotten. A physician, janitor, politician, or pastor commits to a vocation, but daily makes decisions based either on the ethics and demands of the job or personal needs and outside pressures. It is all about choosing whom we will serve. There are big decisions and little ones, tough ones, and easy ones. Every day we make choices and everyday those choices are based on who we are, what our values are, and how we understand our life in relation to such core values. Granted, deciding whether chemotherapy or surgery will be the path to take is a much more difficult decision than what to buy for supper, and yet, there is one choice that changes all choices.

At Sinai, Moses said, "no other gods!" Israel agreed, until they realized there were other tempting choices and decisions became more complicated. When God was not first, their choices followed a random pattern, based on the flavor of the day, the selfishness of the moment, or the pressure from outside.

Jesus was surrounded by disciples who were ready to follow him, until they heard him talk about himself as being like manna from heaven. He said take me into you like food and I will change you and make you part of me. That caused some disciples to change their minds and head home! Did they take that too literally and get confused? Or did they completely understand and decide they didn't really want Jesus to be that much a part of their living. Is it any different or easier for us?

Peter had to decide whether to keep doing what he had always done as a fisherman or commit to an uncertain future and follow Jesus. Saint Paul was a deeply religious man

who felt Jesus was a threat to his way of life and had to decide whether to do all he could to keep others from following Jesus or surrender to a vision which would change his life. For both Peter and Paul, once that first decision was made, all others fell into place.

This is the point of Jesus words about bread of life, his body and blood. His gift of cross and tomb are a sacrifice to empower us no matter what! In all these texts we are reminded Jesus is FOOD! All the nourishment and life we could ever need! When the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the nourishment and power of our lives, that grace will inspire and color everything else that follows.

In Joshua's day, Israel was sitting between two worlds. Their choice was not about where to build their communities or whether to be farmers or shepherds. Their choice was how important would God be in every breath they took and every path they followed. Once they set up housekeeping there would be no turning back. It didn't seem to be that tough a choice. Of course, they had faith. And yet, what decisions would they make when tempted by different values, moralities, or offers too good to resist? What would happen when they had to work for daily bread instead of just waiting for God to drop manna from heaven? They had never been surrounded by so many varieties of temptation before and Joshua asked them to make one commitment that would make all choices much easier to embrace.

At Baptism we promise to teach our children, worship with our children, and help them grow in God's grace. But when they are fussy in worship, or we are too tired to get up, what is our choice? When pressures of friends or fears about the future become more important than faith, what will happen in our lives? When someone faces cancer, or a pandemic, or the loss of a job if there is not certainty of faith about a relationship with God, the choices which must be made become more difficult than if faith is a given and guide for life.

Yes, I am a Christian, but when it comes to keeping God first, or loving and forgiving others who might not deserve such attention what will we do? For that is when we are tempted to sound like those followers who complained, "This is hard to swallow; who can really do it?" and walked away. Paul taught that faith is a choice about surrender – confessing God is more important than me. Faith means not looking back!

I have shared with you many times how my mom made the same thing clear. Her advice was always the same, "remember whose you are." That was her way of saying, "Choose whom you will serve." Martin Luther suggested that each morning the first thing we should do is to make the sign of the cross and remember the miracle of Baptism. Such a choice will color every decision and action of the day when that cross is the guide.

When the love the idea of love for God and neighbor is the first choice, any politician, businessperson, parent, or student would make very different decisions than if selfishness, peer pressure, or earthly gain were the gods to be served. one desires to serve.

The commitment of discipleship is like a diet; it works only if you stick to it! It is like a marriage; it blossoms only if you are committed to it! The hard choice has been made at Calvary and tomb, sometimes we make our response more difficult than it need be. When we look at what Christ has gotten out of the way, what is our problem – really? Following Jesus is difficult only if you don't want to. And the reality is we don't even need to choose Jesus as He has already chosen us! God has made us who we are and loves us just as we are. Jesus models our response and his Spirit fills us with the energy of faith. So, what will you decide? Will you remain in that relationship or run? Live by faith or fear. Be confident or second guess?

Yogi Berra said, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it!" Sometimes we feel that is about all the help we get with choices. But faith affirms there aren't always perfect answers to life, but there is one choice that will color and fill every choice with the love and power of God's presence. Choose who you will serve. Remember whose you are. And when that is what you see in the mirror, each day becomes more confident, joyful, and certain. So, each and every day, let this question of Joshua become your wake-up call. Choose this day whom you will serve. -tws