

## **“Choice #1: Choose Today”**

(Mark 10: 13-16)

The excitement coursed through me as I clinched the plastic bag in my hand and stepped out into the flow of traffic in the mall. I had been saving my weekly allowance to purchase the next book in the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series that I was enamored with growing up. And I could not wait to get home, crack open the book, feel the glue binding give way, and start reading. The premise of these books was part of the appeal. You did not read the book straight through from beginning to end. Rather, after setting up the scene and characters, the story line would lead the reader to a place where a choice needed to be made. You'd be presented with two options and depending on your decision, you'd turn to that page, pick up the story line, until presented with another choice and the cycle would repeat. The idea being that you could read one book several times, making different decisions, turning to the other pages, and each time the book would be different based upon your decisions. I liked having that kind of power. I remember the moment I walked in the door with my prize possession, plopped down on the couch, and started reading. That particular book was about a brave knight who faced a dragon, the fire breathing variety not Puff the magical kind.

I recall reaching the point where I needed to make the first choice in my adventure. After carefully weighing the options, I confidently made my decision, flipped several pages, and found a short paragraph only to read that I had been eaten by the dragon. So, this would not do. I had saved and waited for this book. I hit the rewind button, went back and choose the other option. Soon as I did, I stumbled into another Robert Frost-like two paths diverging in a wood decision to be made. Again, wanting to make a good choice, I pondered, eventually decided, turned the corresponding page, and was promptly eaten by the dragon again. This went on for awhile: me making decisions, becoming a dragon appetizer, rewinding, and trying the other page only to find a similar result.

Now, I am sure part of the pedagogy behind these books was to teach children that choices have consequences and that we need to think carefully about our options. It also taught me that there are moments we all wish our lives had a rewind button, where we could back up, and choose a different path to travel. We make countless choices each day. Some decisions barely even register in our conscious thought. We buy the same type of cereal or order the same kind of coffee. We sit in the same pew. We drive the same roads home from church. In going through the motions, we may not even realize that we are making a choice, but we are. Then, there are other decisions that weigh heavy on our heart and roam endlessly around our minds. We are confronted with a medical decision or what to do about a difficult problem at work or how to resolve a conflict within our family. Choices are a part of life. Decisions are also a part of our life together as a church; each time we take a vote at a meeting we are proclaiming to each other our faith.

Choices, the art of making decisions, is part of being a disciple, more over making decisions has the power to lead us into a deeper relationship with the One in whose image we are created. Scripture records countless decisions the disciples made. And like my ill-fated, eaten by a dragon experience; the disciples often end up wishing they had selected a different path. To be sure, it is puzzling why the disciples would decide to discourage people from bringing their children to Jesus. Just a few short chapters earlier, do you remember just

two weeks ago, we heard how Jesus embraced a child as a visual model for discipleship. What part of welcoming children as beloved did the disciples not get? But perhaps, we should be careful here for we are starting to skate on thin ethical ice and the reality is we still struggle mightily as the church today, as the disciples today, to create a space where the sound and energy of a child in the middle of worship is received as a sign of life and hope and with love.

There are always reasons and rationales to explain why we make the choices we do. Perhaps, the disciples had had a bad day. Perhaps, they were being over protective of Jesus, not wanting him to get burned out, or the line of parents seeking the blessing was now stretched too long. Did you pick up on the emotions woven into the reading? The disciple spoke sternly to the parents and children. They were mad and they lashed out. And the response from Jesus only adds to the tension for we are told he was indignant. Anger and frustration coat each word as he turns to his disciples and I am sure they could feel the heat in his glare as he tells his friends that children have something to offer us and show us and teach us about living faithfully.

What I think children have to teach us is *not* about cute one-liners that make us laugh. What I think children have to teach us is *not* about innocence, for indeed our children in this very neighborhood confront serious issues every day. What I think children have to teach us about living faithfully is to be in the **present and to receive each moment openly and as full of possibility**. Children teach us to choose today, to sink ourselves into God's presence in the present. Living in the moment as sacred is a practice many adults need to re-claim and cultivate. To be honest, it is hard for us to choose the present. Like a parent traipsing through the airport with two toddlers, a stroller, diaper bags, and three backpacks, we carry the baggage of yesterday around with us. It is hard to let go of the comments of a co-worker or the pain of someone's action toward us. It is not just constantly looking in the rearview mirror that causes us to miss the holy right now. We can also become consumed and confounded with real worries about tomorrow. The bills that arrive or our job evaluation looming on the horizon or the strain of an upcoming meeting, we can focus so much of our attention on what is coming up, that we miss God who is right beside us.

To steep and sink ourselves in the sacred of this moment is a choice. Anne Dillard once wrote that 'There is no less holiness in this moment than when the Red Sea parted.' God is no less present right now, today, than when water fell from Jesus face as he was baptized in the Jordan. God is intimately interwoven in our lives today, right now. Choosing today as the possibility for God to move, even disrupt our plans, and guide us with grace is a gift children teach us of how to live in God's realm right now. To be sure to sense the sacred of this moment is not about the power of positive, glass half full, making lemonade out of the lemons life hands you kind of thinking of pop psychology. Choosing today with all its promise and brokenness is about opening ourselves to all that **both bring**. Choosing today is about refusing to let yesterday control today nor the unknown of tomorrow cloud our willingness to be open to God. There is no less holiness in this moment than when the Red Sea parted.

But it is about more than a kind of mental gymnastics, for I think choosing today will challenge and change the very ways we act and live and move about our lives. There are three implications if we make the choice to choose today, to live in the present moment. The first implication of choosing today means that we can no longer put off until tomorrow what God is calling us to be about right now. We need to listen to the holy prompting of God's still

speaking voice both within us and around us. The second implication of choosing today means as we listen we intentionally spend as much time listing reasons **why to do** something as obstacles that arise. Part of opening ourselves to God in this very moment is living into the truth that our God is a God of possibilities and God stretches us to places our rational minds might resist going. So, let us be a church, a community that practices openness to listing both the possibilities and challenges that are implicit in any opportunity. The third implication of choosing today will always be the first choice we make when we open our eyes in the morning. We make this decision either intentionally, prayerfully or by deciding that yesterday or tomorrow are going to hold more sway and power over our actions right now. Choosing today, grounding ourselves in the sacred stirring right here is our first choice and will impact any other decision we make. Choose today. For friends, there is no less holiness in this moment than when Jesus took a child into his arms and blessed her. There is no less sacredness swirling around us and within us than when God spoke and all of creation started dancing in response. There is no less grace and love and peace and hope right now, right here in this very room than when Abe sat here himself. So, choose today. And in doing so, may we like the children centuries ago feel the warm embrace and love that gives us the strength and courage and wisdom to keep on choosing today now and for a thousand todays to come. Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen."