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Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

The first summer after Tim and I were married, we went to the beach with Tim's family. One morning when Tim and his Dad were out golfing, Tim's Mom and I decided to go for a hike. When we got to the place we were going to hike, Becky handed me the map for the trail and asked me to navigate our way. I knew from the first second she asked me to navigate that this was going to be incredibly problematic for this directionally-challenged girl. But not wanting to ruffle feathers as the new member of the family, I agreed.

We decided on the mile circle hike instead of some of the longer, harder hikes that broke off from the main trail. However, about 15 minutes into our leisurely hike, I was pretty sure I had already led us astray. The paths were not well marked and I had clearly chosen the wrong way. We were walking up and down sand dunes without tree cover. The heat of the sun was already beginning to bear down. Several hours later, our "mile hike" was over. Later as we told the story to the rest of the family, Becky confessed that she was pretty sure I was trying to kill her.

I thought of this story as I was reading our scripture for this morning which is the end of a long sermon given by Moses to the people of Israel as they stand along the edge of the Jordan River ready to enter the promised land. They had just completed their, not just a few hours, but 40-year wandering in the wilderness as they left Egypt and made their way to the promised land. They wandered so long that the generation now awaiting arrival into the promised land is not the same generation that left Egypt but their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

As they stand on the cusp of something new, Moses speaks his final words of preparation before they enter this new life. Moses would not enter the promised land with them. The closest he gets is Mount Nebo which looks over the promised land. So, before his death he lays out the future that is ahead of the people and invites them to choose the right path.

You may be able to think of a time when you felt like you were about to step into a significant life moment with vastly different paths of your future before you. Luckily, Moses identifies only two paths before the people of Israel: one of life and prosperity or one of death and adversity. That doesn't sound like a very difficult decision does it? That seems like a no-brainer. I'm not sure I would need to spend much time making pro/con lists and weighing my options. I would like life and prosperity, please!

We are a people who value choice. We like menus with a variety of foods. We like to live in places where we have a variety of restaurants to choose from. We like having different types of cars to choose from and different sports teams to follow. Pepsi or Coke products? Samsung, Verizon, or T Mobile? We often become loyal to a certain brand or model which makes it easier to narrow down our vast options. And sometimes making the choice from so many different options is overwhelming.

This is the point Moses makes by naming a straightforward fork in the road before Israel. He states it as clearly and simply as possibly to show them that the choice is not complicated. Later, he even tells the people which path they should choose: "Choose life" he says, "so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him..."

This moment is what the people of Israel have been training for. This is what they were working toward as they wandered through the wilderness. They had received the

commandments from God on Mt. Sinai and they had been taught how to obey God's ordinances, preparing for the moment they would step into the promised land.

Moses knows he has done all he could to prepare them for this step. In his sermon, right before the section we read today, Moses says: "Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe."

In some ways, Moses was like the parent sending their kid off to college, or off into the real world for the first time. Moses has brought them up and taught them how to discern right from wrong knowing that if they do these things, they will succeed. So, he imparts his last bit of wisdom and sends them off to make their own decisions knowing that new temptations lay ahead as they become a more established and stationary people.

As the Hebrews move into the promised land and become a new people, they will have new freedoms and luxuries that they have never had before. When they were still in Egypt, they didn't have such opportunities but soon they will, and Moses is praying that he has prepared them to make the right choices. Later, in 1 Timothy, we hear the words of caution to those who are rich and prosperous. They are not to be haughty but, "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life."

Choosing the path that leads to life and prosperity is not about physical and monetary success. I do not think the prosperity gospel that says our earthly success is evident of God's blessing, is at all the good news of Christ. The promise of choosing the path that leads to life and prosperity is this "life-that-is-truly-life" described in 1 Timothy. Choosing life for ourselves and our relationships. It is more than deciding to continue to breathe, but it is saying yes to God's vision for human thriving. It means we decide to live in a new way.

Scripture is littered with caution and a sense of immediacy in our choices. Joshua will later on say to the Israelites "Choose this day whom you will serve." Jesus warns that we cannot serve two masters, and through the parable of the sheep and goats he warns us of the clear consequences of choosing to live in a way that devalues the prosperous life of others. The road that leads to life is not merely words or beliefs, but also service and obedience. Loving God means "walking in his ways, and observing his commandments" as we learned from our house rules in Psalm 15 last week.

So, picture this with me: borrowing the image from the famous Robert Frost poem, *The Road Not Taken*, "Two roads diverge in a yellow wood...", they may be equally alluring, both have nice green grass and are lined with beautiful flowers, at least as far as you can see from your perspective at the fork in the road. But one path leads to self-indulgence, self-preservation, adversity of soul. To walk down this path would be to worship the idol of self and of wealth and of safety. The other path leads to self-sacrifice, care for the vulnerable and hurting, and prosperity of joy. To walk down this path would mean loving the Lord your God and loving your neighbor, walking in God's ways, and observing God's commandments. This path leads to life that is truly life. A life that is abundant, beginning now and entering into eternity.

These paths are laid out before you today and every other day that follows. At first glance, the decision may not seem so straight forward, but the hope is quite simply put. Choose

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life! Choose the path that leads to prosperity of joy. Choose that walk of righteousness, of faith, of discipleship.

Today we would like to give any and all an opportunity to choose life, to choose obedience, to choose discipleship and forgiveness. If you would like to make this choice, you are invited to come forward when the pastors and deacons are in place and be anointed. You may choose to be anointed for healing so that you can do the work of God. You may choose to be anointed as a faith commitment or renewal. You may choose to be anointed as a response to a call on your heart. Whatever the reason may be, you are invited to come forward and receive the gift of oil.

Before you today are two paths: one of life and prosperity and one of death and adversity. Today, choose life so that you may have life and live it abundantly, loving the Lord your God, obeying and holding fast to God; for that means life to you. Choose life. Choose life. Choose life!