

Choosing Life ~ February 13, 2011

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; I Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37; Psalm 119:1-8

Aldous Huxley penned:

*The choice is always ours. Then, let me choose
The longest art, the hard Promethean way
Cherishingly to tend and feed and fan
That inward fire, whose small precarious flame,
Kindled or quenched creates,
The noble or ignoble men we are,
The worlds we live in and the very fates,
Our bright or muddy star.*

And Tevye sang:

*To life, to life, l'chaim.
L'chaim, l'chaim, to life.
Life has a way of confusing us,
Blessing and bruising us.
Drink, l'chaim, to life!*

What an exciting 20 days it has been in Egypt, as people struggle to choose a new and, what we all hope will be, better way of life. They fanned that inner fire and created the new world they live in at this moment. They have had a peaceful revolution, an evolution into a new way of being.

Why did they do this? They had set before them life or death and they opted for life and a new government. Someone has said, "They are stumbling toward democracy." We will have to wait to see what comes of this and whether the people of that nation, through hard work, are able to create "a bright or muddy star." In the meantime, they are giddy with delight and raising toasts to life. They feel free. They feel hopeful. Perhaps, they have fanned the fire that will spread to other oppressed people.

The words in Deuteronomy were spoken by Moses to the nation Israel. God, through Moses, told that nation that living by the Creator's commandments would lead it to life in the Promised Land. If it failed to live up to God's expectations there would be dire consequences.

We all know that Israel continually wavered back and forth between the choice of life and death. Choosing life meant that they were called to follow a difficult and narrow pathway, a Promethean way, and to lead disciplined lives. Then, as now, this choice gave those people pause.

Centuries later, Paul confronted the church in Corinth with the same choice. They could continue fighting and arguing with one another about who was more important, or they could turn to more spiritual matters that would bind them together and ensure that the "good news" of Jesus would endure. What was it to be? Individual egos or an all for one and one for all attitude? We need to note that this church did not survive, even after all the words of wisdom Paul sought to share with it. They simply could not or would not get their act together.

This brings us to our reading from "The Sermon on the Mount," which is full of advice on how life should be lived if we wish to find all the abundance it holds for us. In effect, throughout this collection of the teachings of Jesus, he is saying, "I have set before you life and prosperity or death and adversity, choose life."

Choosing life calls us to follow the ways of Christ in all we say and think and do. It calls us into a partnership. When we choose to enter into this partnership, life will never be the same again. Our old way of life must be set aside as we take up the new.

If we choose to do this, we begin to see and handle events in life in a different way than we have in the past. We recognize that everyone, no matter how much we might like them or dislike them has value in the eyes of God. Because each of us is a reflection of God's love to others, each of us must begin to see those around us as having value.

Difficult? Yes, it is.....but the change it brings about in our attitudes comes back to us in the change in attitudes we see around us. We can change our corner of the world through an alteration in the way we live and move and have our being. Kindness and patience and love go a long way, as does understanding of the human condition in general and that which is right before our very eyes.

Instead of brushing people off as worthless, those who do not share our particular viewpoint, we need to back off a bit and wonder if what we find as useless in them is what we dislike the most about ourselves. When we begin to think this way and see others with the eyes of Jesus we are awakened to a new way of being.

What a wonderful transformation this is. We feel free. We feel as if we have overthrown the dictatorship that has kept our lives and our love in check. We rediscover that small inner fire that can become something great in transforming ourselves and the world closest to us. It is a "metanoia," a turning around, an evolution into a new way of being. We alone can determine if we will create a "bright or muddy star" with our lives.

Our faith system is all about change, transformation, and the evolution of our souls. By choosing the more difficult, Promethean way set before us by Jesus, we will be led to a more gracious, fulfilling way of life. Even if "life has a way of confusing us, blessing or bruising us, we will be able to drink, l'chaim, to life."

-- Amen