

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

Choices.

- We all have many choices to make in life.
- And for that matter, we all have many choices to make every day.

Just today, for example, each of you had a choice to make.....to be here or not.

- To come to God's House.....
- To hear Him speak to us, forgive us our sins, and receive all His blessings.....
- Including food for the journey in the Holy Communion that you will be offered in just a little bit.

Or.....you could have chosen not to be here (or involved in the live streaming of this service) and done whatever else Sunday morning could be for you.....

- Sleeping in.
- Going out to breakfast.
- Lounging around the house and starting the day in "low gear."
- Or even, starting whatever preparations and plans you might have for the Super Bowl Game.
- After all, even by its name it is going to be super!

In fact, consider these statistics.

- Going from demographic studies taken.....about 20 percent of Granite City will be in church today.
- Contrast that, if we go by the national average, 75 percent of Granite City will be watching the super bowl.....or at least the commercials and half time show.

Choices.

- Some seem easy and are no brainers.
- Others are not.
- And some choices are not at all what they seem to be.

TV and commercials play on this.

- They pull at you that to chose them is the easiest and best choice you can make.

I'm sure each of you have seen all the Capital One banking commercials running lately that says to choose them is easier than.....

- Well, choosing former six foot six, 250 pound former professional basketball player Charles Barkley over a bunch of little kids in a pick up game of basketball.
- Or, to pick Slash, lead guitarist for Guns N Roses over a bunch of amateurs in auditions for a guitar playing role.

With that, I would like to direct your attention to one other commercial of a similar flavor that perhaps fits this message even better.

- It is a little bit older and perhaps not as familiar to you.
- It came out in 2016 when Halo Mandarin Oranges kicked off a "Good Choice Kid" ad campaign.
- It turns out they did this in conjunction with a bumper crop of oranges they had that year.
- These commercials were a bit bizarre, perhaps to help get our attention and have us remember them.....as I'm doing today.

In one of the commercials there is a young girl walking through a dark world.

- She has a Halo Mandarin Orange in her hand.
- She is in the middle of what looks to be a haunted forest.

And the young girl is confronted by a shriveled featured, raspy voice, witch looking woman.

- The elderly woman has a dark apple with a significant rotten spot on it.

The elderly woman asks the young girl if she wants to trade snacks.

- The young girl hesitates and asks.....is that a poison apple?
- "NO", said the elderly woman.
- It is a wish apple.

The rotten spot on the apple then takes on the form of a face and says.....

- Yeah, it is a wish apple if you wish it to be full of poison.
- The elderly lady quickly asserts, "Shut up!"

And then the lady continues with the young girl.....

- "Want it?"

And then the commercial moves to the final scene.....

- The scary witch is being arrested by authorities, while the young girl enjoys a slice of her Halo orange.
- And the voice over in the commercial says, “Good Choice Kid.” “Sweet, juicy, easy to peel Halo oranges.”

Indeed a good choice.

- The point of these commercials....is that there is really not much of a choice at all.
- The right choice is pretty obvious.

Some choices in life are that way.

- You don’t need to be told what to choose.
- There is no doubt about it.
- It speaks for itself.

Which is why our Old Testament reading from the Book of Deuteronomy seems a bit odd.

- Moses lays out a choice for the people of Israel.....and by application to us also.

It is a significant moment in Israel’s history.

- They are finally, 40 long years, 40 long years of waiting and wandering.....
- And they are finally on the verge of fulfilling the promise and entering into the Promised Land.
- It was now close and they knew it.

So before they make the last push across the Jordan and into the new homeland, God directs Moses to review the covenant plan with Israel one more time.

- A rather thorough review, we might add, the entire Book of Deuteronomy’s worth!

And now we get the summary appeal.

- A choice needs to be made.
- Will Israel hang on to the wonderful gifts of the covenant.....or, will they trade their blessings for the poison of a strange people.

And Moses, in our Old Testament reading for today lays before the people a choice.....

- See, I have set before you today LIFE AND GOOD, DEATH AND EVIL.

That's the choice.

- Look at our Old Testament reading for today. It is the first verse that was read.

On the one hand—LIFE AND BLESSINGS. On the other hand—DEATH AND CURSE.

- Hardly seems like much of a choice.
- No struggle here.

So choose life in order that you may live.

- Yeah, I think. No kidding.
- What is so difficult about this choice?
- DEATH, CURSE.....LIFE, GOOD BLESSINGS.
- WONDERFUL HALO.....or POISON APPLE.

Not a hard choice, is it?

- But it is odd how mightily Israel struggles with this choice. How mightily we struggle with this choice.
- Moses seems to know it is not exactly a slam dunk.
- He makes an earnest plea to the people.

And his misgivings are well founded.

- The bizarre reality is that Israel had a very hard time choosing life.
- Somehow they actually managed with great consistency and determination to reject the offer of life and choose death instead.

Quite remarkable.....or maybe not so remarkable.

- It is easy enough for us to understand the struggles Israel had with their choice.
- We also know something about the difficulty of choosing life and rejecting death.

The problem is....so often the choice of death doesn't look like death.

- Death is marketed very well. It looks enticing.
- The death that lurks in the choices is not immediately present.
- The choice between life and death is not so obvious after all.

The choices you face multiple times every day.

- And the moment of decision rarely comes packaged with the drama of a commercial or laid out with the significance of Deuteronomy.
- The choices are subtle and come in a parade of daily routine temptations.
- Little choices, small decisions, tiny determinations.
- A word, a glance. Silence. A sigh. A click. A giving in.

So easily are we distracted and attracted by the death all around us.....

- So easily we drop the blessings of God and clutch the cursed apple.

But it doesn't look so cursed.

- It looks wonderful. It looks like a party full of laughter and pleasure.
- It looks like the enhancement of your strongest desire and the fulfillment of your loftiest dreams.

It looks like your desire to be in charge. To put yourself and your trust in yourself above God.

- It looks like giving into temptation and not living God's Word in your speech and actions.
- It looks like putting those things that look so attractive and like so much fun ahead of time in God's House.
- It looks like rebelling against those placed in authority over you. I want to be my own boss.
- It looks like thinking poorly and having ill wishes for those you consider your enemy.
- It looks like those inappropriate glances and thoughts about those you are attracted to.

It looks like over charging, or getting dollars from others beyond what is fare and reasonable. You want to get ahead.

- It looks like the fun you have and how it makes you feel good when you gossip about others.
- And it looks like the jealousy you have of others to the point of doing things for personal gain at their expense.

Moses in his appeal to the people of Israel cited The Ten Commandments.

- In what I just provided you is an example from each of The Commandments!
- The apple looks so delicious and so you reject life and choose death.

Fooled by an apple full of poison.

- Want more affirmation of this?

- Just ask Eve about the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.
- And we have been struggling ever since.
- By our sinful nature, by the nature of this sinful world we live in.....we are pulled and attracted to death and evil. We chase after and choose death over life.
- Our nature and the world pulls us in just the opposite of God and life.

And it doesn't help that the choice of life is equally disguised.

- In His wisdom God hides life in the shape of a cross.
- Last week, if you were able to be with us, we said that the cross illuminates and leads us in all aspects of life.

But the cross doesn't look like life.

- It looks instead like an agonizing death.
- The choice of life doesn't look like life.
- The choice of life is the cross.

It makes no sense. It is not a choice anyone would make naturally.

- No wonder Moses had to mount a rigorous campaign for the choice of life.
- No wonder Jesus had to urge His disciples to take up the cross.
- Not a choice that sells itself.
- Nothing obvious about it. The opposite actually.

Who would choose the cross?

- To choose the cross is to choose death.....of yourself, but life in Christ.
- The cross is the protracted painstaking execution of ourselves....and we don't like that.
- It goes against our sinful nature and what the wisdom of the world would tell us.
- Your carefully cultivated sense of personal identity and meticulously maintained image you pamper and project are wiped out by the cross.

But it is where we must begin.

- The surrender of self, the forsaking of evil preservation, and the turning back of self promotion.
- God expects much from those who would choose life.
- Small wonder we must be exhorted and reminded to choose life.

In fact, who would choose it?

- Jesus would. Jesus did.
- He made His choice because, above all else, He was determined to do the Father's will.
- Jesus chose the cross because the Father had already chosen the salvation of His people.

God chose the children of Israel.

- Moses appeal was that the chosen people acknowledge God's choice and take what God had already decided and given.

Only one choice matters.

- Only one choice can give life. Only God's choice.
- The people did not need to choose God, God had already chosen them.
- All that remained was to see if they would recognize His choice and receive the benefits of His giving.....
- Or foolishly and rebelliously reject God's choice and go their own way instead.
- Choosing life is nothing more than agreeing with God's choice already made.

What a strange choice God made.

- Nothing obvious.
- And frankly, looking at the people, it didn't look like a good choice.

But God chose Israel.

- But like it or not, and often they didn't like it, they were His people.

Good choice or bad choice.....God chose you also.

- You are His own elect child.
- You, like it or not, it is so.

The only question left is what now you will do with His choice.

- Will you embrace it? Will you take up the cross?
- The choice you have to make is if you agree with God's choice or do you reject it.

Will you spurn His choice....whether all at once or by slow degrees.

- Our sinful nature and the world will tell us to go the opposite direction.....and head off on the inviting and pleasant path that ultimately ends finally in death.

What will you choose?. It is the only question that confronts us.

- God has made His choice. What will you choose?
- Just like the children of Israel were close to the Promised Land, wherever you are in life, you are close to that day of entering or rejecting eternity with Christ.
- Don't squander the gift. Don't fight Him on this.

Relent. Die to yourself.

- Listen to Moses. Listen to Jesus.
- Choose the cross. Choose life.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.