

Given a Choice

We have a choice. It is a truly awesome gift, simultaneously wonderful and terrifying.

We can stay in a dark yet comfortable corner, even when we wish we lived in the light.

From the moment we get up in the morning, until we choose to go to sleep at night, we are making decisions that form our lives. We choose the words we speak or do not speak, the people we love or do not even see, the thoughts we entertain or reject, the deeds we do or leave undone. We choose whether to have coffee in the morning, what to wear and whether we are coming to church. It is wonderful to be able to choose to kiss a partner or child, to eat a delicious meal, to crawl into a comfy bed at the end of the day, or to help a friend in need.

Some decisions are more terrifying, such as choosing to drive drunk, to have to select between two people, to decide whether to leave a dangerous environment such as a homeland that is a warzone or evacuate your home because of wildfire or flood.

As the author of Ecclesiastes says,

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;”
That is true for our choices, too! There is a time, a right time.

All these times under heaven are times of choice. Some are mundanely easy, others are terrifyingly difficult, and some are not always what they appear to be.

The people of Israel have been given a choice. They had chosen to complain about their situation in the desert as they make their way from Egypt to the promised land, and the Lord has sent poisonous snakes among them. Moses intercedes and the people can choose to change their attitude, if so when they are bitten by a snake, they can look up at the bronze serpent on a pole and they will live. They have been given a choice. If they believe that by looking up at the bronze serpent they will live, then they will live.

It is this choice that Jesus alludes to in his response to Nicodemus, when Nicodemus visits Jesus at night. Jesus will die hanging on a cross, an image very similar in many ways to the image of the serpent on the pole. And those who choose to look at Jesus, will be saved. Nicodemus was part of the Jewish temple leadership, although he did not always go along with all the temple decisions.

Sometime after this discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, the Roman and Jewish leadership will make a choice about this rogue preacher named Jesus, and chose to hang him on a cross as an example of what would happen to those who followed Jesus. They were right that Jesus would become an example, but not, we can attest 2,000 years later, the example they hoped. They wanted to silence the followers of Jesus, and that did not happen.

In the world around us, and in our communities and neighbourhoods, our current political and social discourse, our public conversation is becoming highly polarized, often not very tolerant, sometimes even violent.

We are losing our ability to listen to, and possibly even learn from, the other person's point of view.

To add to the tension, it feels like there has been a spate of political killings in the USA recently. The most recent was Charlie Kirk the founder of Turning Point USA who was assassinated on Wednesday (2025 September 10). Perhaps you remember that in June a gunman went on a rampage killing and injuring Minnesota state representatives. Some people have chosen to use a gun to express their feelings and frustrations.

We are not immune from the rhetoric and polarized politics here in Canada.

There have been credible threats against many of our politicians and other government leaders.

I understand the frustrations when conversation seem to fall on deaf ears, when the response seems to be *my way or the highway*.

To choose violence is simply not acceptable.

How we respond is a choice. We have a choice.

What we do know ... is that God has a choice.

And God has decided to love the world,
the whole world.

Not just those who gather on Sunday,
not just the religiously inclined,
not just those who have heard the name of Jesus ...
but the whole world, the whole wide world.

God loves you, and you, and me,
and God loves that really annoying person who spouts all sorts of stuff that we do not agree with, even all sorts of stuff that is offensive. Yes, God loves them too!

We know that God loves, you and me and them, because, Jesus has told us that,
"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,"

God came as Christ to show us the way to life, in the midst of death.

God has a choice. ... We have a choice.

When we do not have the courage to choose what is best, but act as if our choices do not matter,
we make no progress even on the smoothest path.
When we choose courageously, we move forward even on the roughest road.

God helps us choose eternal life. God sent his Son to not to condemn us but that we might be saved through him.
Not to judge us but to bring light into the world.

But in all these decisions, these choices, there is one that is not a choice - that God has chosen to love you. Not the team, the group, the community or them. God has chosen to love you.

For this we can give thanks in the words of our Psalm,
"Sing to the LORD new songs; proclaim what marvels have been done"

Thanks be to God. Amen.