

Sermon for the Second Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20a. Hebrews 12:18-25. Psalm 95:6-end.
Luke 13:15-24.

The Collect: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service: gran, we beseech thee that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

The other night I watched a programme in which a celebrity cook and a celebrity maître d'hôtel were exploring Morocco's catering scene. At one restaurant the cook insisted that the maître d put the menu down as she had already ordered what he must eat. She insisted that he would like it. He jocularly (?) responded that he was only letting her be in charge because he was allowing it. In the end, he did like the slow cooked lamb tagine very much. It looked great, and I think I would have liked it too. But, the problem for me would be that I would have to have known that it was not cooked with dairy products or aubergines. Alternatively, I could just trust the person who cooked it to know what was harmful for me or otherwise. I have done so more than once and suffered as a consequence. The point of all this is that every human action involves choice and trust. You would be hard pressed to think of an example to the contrary. Go on then...

At the very epicentre of educational psychology lies the question as to nature or nurture, instinctive behaviour or free will? Deuteronomy 30:19 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life...' This is one of the most important texts of the Hebrew Bible. It occurs towards the end of Moses' life and his leadership of the Children of Israel from the desert to the edge of the Promised Land. He is going to hand over the reigns of leadership to Joshua. He himself will not have the privilege of going across the Jordan, but will die on Mount Nebo and be buried by God. Why didn't God let Moses in with them? Because Moses had broken faith with God at the waters of Meribath-kadesh. He had struck a rock (twice) in order to allow water to flow out for the people (Numbers 20:10-13). Previously he had struck a rock in a similar way, but it had not resulted in God's anger. Here, Moses had struck the rock twice (he was determined to get water to flow by using his own

knowledge and strength), but had he done what God had commanded, namely to ‘speak’ to the rock, a miracle of God would have been demonstrated. The focus was thus on Moses, not on the power of God.

Woe betide us when we seek to demonstrate our own power rather than choose to trust God to show His. Our actions stem from our choices. We are not animals who run for water when we break out of our shell. True, humans do have to learn how to behave in their societal context. True, new-born babies suck when you put a finger in their mouth. St Peter (1 Peter 2:2) urges Christians who are young in the faith to crave spiritual milk so that they may grow up in salvation. In St Luke’s gospel of today we are told of the wrong choices (though perfectly sensible and religiously legal according to the Torah) that some guests make instead of attending a banquet. It is unlikely that the guests would have had to make a spontaneous decision, because, in that culture, they would have all known in advance that a banquet was going to take place. They were choosing their own interests, and their own company, over that of a generous host. This was extremely insulting. Indeed, it would prove to be a costly mistake too.

We live in an age and location where making choices (mostly in our own favour) are ‘second nature’. In fact, they are ‘first nature’ not second. We are intrinsically self-centred or, worse, selfish. Altruism is in short supply. But, as the writer of Hebrews warns, we have to recognise that approaching the city of the living God should cause us to tremble like Moses did on Mount Sinai witness to terrifying signs of God’s presence in thunder and fire. God says (Deuteronomy 30:15ff) that it is possible to make choices, between life and good, death and evil, and also that there is a cost to them. To choose the wrong thing is to be aware of what would have been better. God had showed them in the teachings of Moses, and by Moses sometimes flawed leadership, what would happen when they chose to trust God. God would provide generously and miraculously when their heart turned towards Him, listened to Him, worshiped Him only, and served Him. In short, they would live long in the land, and be blessed.

As our Collect for today reminds us: we should be faithful to God and do Him true and laudable service, finally to attain his heavenly promises through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Choose life and be blessed.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.