

Sunday 16th February 2014 Grahamstown Cathedral 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		6th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Epiphany 4 – Year A
Deut 30:15-20	Ps 119:1-8	1 Cor 3:1-9
		Matthew 5:21-37
CHOOSE LIFE		

“Today I offer you the choice of life and good, or death and evil.... Choose life and you and your descendants will live; love the Lord your God, obey him, and hold fast to him; that is life for you...” (Deut 30:15, 19f.)

CHOOSE LIFE

As always, we have a rich feast of scripture readings given to us this morning. Remember who you are – and choose life! – says Moses to the people of Israel. Be salt in a world going bad, be light where there is darkness, be unique and different from those around you, in how you live – says Jesus. Wonderful words for the end of Rhodes O-Week; wonderful words for us all.

Our reading from Deuteronomy forms part of Moses’ final great address to the people of Israel, shortly before his death. He takes them through the history of their liberation from being slaves in Egypt, their journey across the Red Sea, their encounter with God at Mt Sinai, their forty years of wandering in the wilderness – years in which they were shaped, forged, into God’s people.

Moses, who has led them all these years, has one final gift to give before he steps down from leadership. He reminds them who they are. In the movie, *The Lion King*, Simba is the young lion, born and destined to rule. For a while, deeply wounded by the tragic death of his father, and believing that he is responsible for his father’s death, he loses his way. He turns his back on his heritage, his roots, his family, his past. He lives a happy, carefree life – but in fact he has lost his way, he has lost his purpose in life, is running away from what he is called to do – until he is told in a vision, “Remember who you are.”

Moses reminds the people of Israel – remember who you are. Remember how God has led you. Remember the journey you have travelled. Remember who you are. And because of who you are, because of the journey on which God has led you, because of all that God has done in your life as a nation, you are now to choose – and to choose (in sobering and even terrifying words) between “life and good, death and evil” (Deut 30:15).

Remember who you are – and choose life. It’s a choice that each one of us has to make; it’s a choice that each new generation has to make – the choice between life and death. The choice, on the one hand, of life - to love God and to obey his commandments – to put God first in our lives and decisions; to shape our lives, the way we live, the values we hold to, according to the commands of God; to choose the path that brings freedom and peace and liberation, the path that sets others free because it is also the path of justice and compassion, the path that looks to the needs of others. Choose life.

On the other hand, the choice of death – the choice that turns away from God, a choice of slavery instead of freedom, violence and conflict instead of peace, oppression instead of liberation; corruption and injustice instead of justice, cruelty and hardness of heart instead of compassion. The choice of death.

Remember who you are – and choose life – is what our student ministry team is saying to fellow students, first years here at Rhodes, many away from home for the first time.

Remember who you are – and choose life – is the prayer of those of us who are parents, guardians, as we nurture and raise our children.

Remember/discover who you are – and choose life – is the call and invitation of the church to all who come, all who seek – to find and discover life.

Remember who you are – and choose life – is the path being walked by those preparing for Confirmation, or by those who are bringing children for baptism, or by those who want the blessing of the church on their marriage.

Choose life – is the reminder and the invitation for you and me, for all who worship here today.

BE LIKE CHRIST

Remember who you are - choose life - and become like Christ. What does that mean? How are we to live?

Our Gospel reading is part of the Sermon on the Mount, that great block of teaching, Matthew 5-7, which we are enjoying each Sunday at the moment. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is the great teacher, sitting in the seat of Moses.

He says, “Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete.” (Matt 5:17)

He then goes on, in the Gospel we heard, to show what he means. He takes the Ten Commandments, and goes deeper, beyond the letter of the law, to the spirit, the heart, the root. He introduces each commandment with the words “You have heard that our forefathers were told.... But what I tell you is this.... (Mt 5:21f).

Our reading focuses on three of the commandments – do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not break your oath. Jesus expands them to address things that are relevant to us all: how we are to be peace-makers in times of conflict; what it means to be faithful in our most intimate relationships; how we are to be people of integrity and honesty. And he shows us what it means to truly obey the commandments, by turning a negative prohibition – do not do this or that – into something positive – this is how you are to live.

THE THREE COMMANDMENTS

Do not commit murder (the 5th commandment) – being peace-makers in times of conflict.

I trust that no-one here is a killer. So on the surface we have all faithfully obeyed that commandment. But how do we behave in times of great conflict? How often in our anger or in our quarrels, in our conflicts and disagreements, have we destroyed our opponent with our words, or wished for them to just disappear – to go away?

Instead, Jesus says, not only must we avoid wrath or anger or name-calling: we are to go out of our way to make peace. And here is the positive injunction. “If you ... remember that your brother has a grievance against you... go and make peace with your brother...” (Mt 5:23f.) We don’t wait for the offended person to come to us; we reach out to them. We go the extra mile. When we find ourselves in conflict, in an argument, a quarrel, we are to make peace.

In the culture of violence that is so prevalent in our country, we are to be peace-makers, healers, reconcilers. In the spate of violent service-delivery protests that are happening across our land, we need to be there as the ones who are for peace? But we also must ask - how are we to respond in the face of poor service delivery, when we justifiably feel outraged, angry, frustrated? When Makana is unable to mend pipes, restore electricity, fix potholes?

Do not commit adultery (the 6th commandment) – faithfulness in our most intimate relationships – and here I want to wish you a belated Happy Valentine’s Day.

Adultery is a break of the marriage bond. It is a sexual relationship outside of marriage, where one person is already married to someone else.

Jesus goes beyond the commandment, to the spirit behind it: to be faithful in our most intimate relationships and friendships.

Unfaithfulness is not just another partner in one's bed. It is looking "at a woman with a lustful eye" (Mt 5:28) – the flirtations at work; the sexy remarks; pornography; the TV ads for the sexy pictures on one's cell-phone. Be faithful to the one you love – not only in body, but also in heart, mind, and thought.

And being faithful also means being a good friend, being loyal, being caring, being trustworthy, being there for our friends in times of heart-ache and tragedy and loss.

"Do not break your oath" (the 9th commandment) – being people of integrity and honesty – so important as our country prepares itself for the general elections in May, and following on from the State of the Nation address on Thursday.

Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no. Be trustworthy. If you say you will do something, then do it. Let us be people whose word is our promise. Be people of integrity.

CONCLUSION

Remember who you are. Choose life. Love God.

Let us be peacemakers; let us be faithful in our most intimate relationships; let us be trustworthy.

"Let your light so shine among others, that when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven." (Mt 5:16)