

This is a sermon from Rev. Jack Belmont preached at All Saints' Church, Princeton NJ on September 4, 2022. This is a transcribed copy of his original sermon

Let us pray.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us so love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is discord, union where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy.

Granted that we may not seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

What is giving that we receive it is unpardoned that we are pardoned it is in dying that we are born to eternal life Amen.

From Deuteronomy this morning, choose life that you or your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God obeying him holding fast to him. That means life to you and length of days.

And then from the Gospel reading this morning these closing words of Jesus.

So therefore, none of you can become my disciples. If you do not give up all your possessions.

We'll unpack that in a minute.

it's Labor Day weekend. Great holiday of our nation. For me, it's the fall it's filled with hope, because I'm an Eagles fan. But not so much this year.

Our society and our nation are in trouble.

As we hear this we turn to Scripture. We're seeing what God might have to say about all of this.

Today's scripture readings proclaim that all of us have some choices to make. This troubling Gospel passage comes from what is called the travel narratives of Luke.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. For him, a future that he's very aware of. And he makes these seeming outrageous statements. Hyperbolic statements to the crowd that are following him. If you want to follow me, you got to be willing to leave your own safety behind it. Take up your cross and follow Me for those who care for their own safety are lost.

You must give up all your possessions.

Or if you're following me, where I'm going, you're not going to need them anymore. Hate your family, sell your possessions

All of you who are ready to make these choices, raise your hand. Didn't think so?

I'm not, certain people have heard these words. And take them to heart and use this as a source of their strength in their ministry. But not all of us have to do it this way.

I'm reminded of St. Francis of Assisi, whose prayer we use this morning at the beginning of the homily.

Some of you may know St. Francis story.

He was a poor little rich kid who grew up lavished by all kinds of wonderful worldly goods and a family that took care of him. He was a warrior who went off to battle. The people of Assisi was captured and imprisoned.

And as he was imprisoned, he seemed to come to his senses about what God was calling him to do uniquely with his life.

Him to do uniquely with his life to make a choice.

He returned to Assisi and struggled and struggled and struggled and finally he renounced all of the worldly goods which with which he had been labored with and he stood naked before the Bishop of the town. His family thought he lost his mind.

He probably had and found a new mind, a mind of Christ.

And he went off and lived with the poor in rags, became a minister to the poor around the city.

An amazing story that we venerate him today because of all he did to spread the Gospel of love, especially to the downtrodden and to the poor of his area.

Sandy and I had the privilege of visiting Assisi several years ago when we went to Italy and we saw some of these places that were sacred to his life and to the people of that area.

And what I recall most vividly is not this humble little church where he worship but rather this grand basilica. Some of you may have seen it, that were built to honor him with all these, you know, frescoes all over the place telling the story of the gospel.

And I said to Sandy, I wonder what Francis would have thought of all this today, I wonder

The second reading from Philemon

Do you know the story of Philemon and Onesimus his slave. This is the shortest book of the Bible by the way, this epistle that we know Paul wrote, some of them. We're not exactly sure who wrote them.

But Paul is writing to Philemon, a person that he had converted to Christianity and he writes to him as his father in Christ. And says to him, you know, this past period of time I've been living imprisoned, and a runaway slave named Onesimus, who was your property has been incredible comfort to me.

I was wondering, not commanding, but wondering if you would be willing in the Spirit of Christ to accept him back.

In Love and care as a brother in Christ. Paul is not commanding him to do it.

But saying to Philemon, that you choose, you make the choice, giving him the freedom to make the choice and to do the right thing.

As God's people, we become aware of the fact that we have the freedom to choose, and we should choose.

And I'll say parenthetically, that includes all of the young women that we encounter in our lives and you know what I'm talking about.

They have the right to choose, to make the right choices for them, which we may not agree with, which we may not choose for ourselves.

But that right to choose is permanent understanding of who we are as people freed in Christ.

Then the last reading, in many ways, the most demanding of all, from Deuteronomy.

This is a sermon attributed to Moses whether or not Moses actually spoke it or not is doubtful. It was probably written in the seventh century BC by historians that were reforming worship in Israel at the time during the reign of Josiah the king.

The writer reminds the people of his society.

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God obeying him holding fast to him. That means life to you. And length of days.

Basically, what the Deuteronomist is saying is we have this beautiful gift of the law that God has given us.

We are free to choose to abandon that law or to obey that law because that law is the basis of who we are as God's people, it represents our society.

So we need to ask ourselves, what is being spoken to us today? In our time, we are being challenged to choose the kind of society that we want to be here and now.

A self serving lot who care only for me and my rights, or a generous giving land of the free and the brave, acknowledging the rights of others to be free to make choices in their lives.

Are we a people who respect and follow the rule of law and a society; or a society that exploits and suppresses the freedom of others?

Today as Christians and as Americans, we get to choose.

We get to choose leadership that we feel that will uphold the vision of what God has for this great nation of ours, and what God has for us as a society

So choose life that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God obeying him holding fast to him with that means life to you and length of days

Choosing life for ourselves, we are also choosing life for others.

Amen.