

September 4, 2022 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Pr. Steve

Texts: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20; Luke 14: 25-33

In the name of God, Abba-Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week I described the caste system in America.  
The Dominant caste--the ruling, the favored people.  
The Middle caste--Asian folks, Latinos, Latinas.  
The subordinate caste--African Americans.  
And the original caste--The Indigenous.

I asked if there were any objections. And Pat said, "I object."  
I was preaching! Well today, a great poet and God join Pat in objecting.

God is not neutral. In times like these of fires and fury, God is not by the wayside. God is involved. God commits, and God has always chosen life. God chose to give us the Creation that we might have a place to live. God has chosen us--through our ancestors--to bless us with life. We have received life; God wants to make it a blessing. And this very life and love and truth is pulsating in our own bodies through our bloodstreams.

God, that very word of truth, is in and near us, on your lips, in [y]our heart, in [y]our hands. The scriptures say Jesus quoted Deuteronomy repeatedly. God is not off some far distance away. God is within you. So, that great mystic says, *God is your being, pulsating through your being*. We are of God. We are not God, but we are of God.

And it is that intimacy which confounds us. We keep looking elsewhere. We'll even search the dark to find out what should be going on here--when all the while God is within us. Thomas Merton said, *'You know that emptiness, that aridity, that sorrow you feel in your heart that just won't go away? That's God--looking to fully and freely establish that home within us.'* Within us.

So, God says in the text today, *'I'm giving you a choice. I love you so much that you get the choice. I will not mandate your behavior. You are free to choose, I put before you life, prosperity...or death and disaster.'* God says, *'Choose life. Choose life!'*

Grace is the energy to live in the love of God. It's what brings us to life. It's what makes us alive; it makes us *lively*. It generates life within us and among us. Grace is never static--it's charging us with what really matters. *"The glory of God is the human being fully alive."* So said St. Irenaeus 1,900 years ago, within the very first century of Jesus. The glory of God is the human being fully alive, engaged, aware, committed.

That liveliness must become personal. (It doesn't mean you have to live in some ecstatic fashion. It doesn't mean introverts don't count.) What it means is *"Who is this baptized self*

*that you and I have been called to become?"* That is your most profound gift--not only to us--but through us to others,

The glory of God is a human being fully alive. That liveliness comes in all kinds of ways. It raises questions, it objects, it resists, it objects. That's an alive person. Here I stand. I'm committed. But it also leads to beauty and appreciation, to understanding, to community, to healing, to transformation--because one is alive and can't just sit there.

Our temptation, again, is to keep chasing things far, far away. *Maybe that's got the solution. Maybe that's where Heaven is found.* This beautiful psalm, as Bernadette says, "We will even hunt in the dark," looking to find something that will give us meaning.'

It's a major sales pitch these days to say 'Genius will save you, if you just become a genius.' *'Aren't you exceptional? Don't you want to be exceptional?'*

No, we aren't. Most of us aren't geniuses, but neither is Silicon Valley. *(They're going to save us? They can't even make a phone that doesn't have to keep updating!)*

They're going to save us? How about a high-income bracket? That will save us? Gender is used. Culture, high culture, right? If only we could live in New York City! Then it would all come together.

I remember a wonderful Broadway star made this comment. She said, 'When I finally broke through and made it as a star, they told me, 'The world is [mine] yours. You've arrived!' And she said, 'It took me a decade to realize I just conquered the world of Broadway. That's all. Now that's cool. Come on, pretty cool, but it's not the world, and it doesn't save us. Not just prestige, or status, or whatever we choose. No, it's about our coming to life as the persons we are. And see, that takes a lot of work, first of all, to even like ourselves, right?

[To two children] Some of the people who are a little bit older than you two guys today, some of these people have been working on it for say, 30-40 years to like themselves. I hope you cut to the chase much sooner. Maybe start this week. *'I'm of God. I'm blessed to be a blessing here. This me now.'*

Huh? Don't waste all that time. Because it's hard, isn't it? To like ourselves, to love ourselves, to grow in understanding, their appreciating who we are so that we can participate in the well-being of others. It's not just about us, whoop-dee-doo, it's the connections that bring us to life. And we all say it and share it and know it. When we can contribute to the well-being of others, we come to life.

This passage in Deuteronomy that we heard today is almost screaming off the page. It is Beethovenian joy when God says, "It is my delight to make you prosper. It is my delight. As I made your ancestors to come to life to live with vitality and creativity and joy. That's God singing--the very heart of God's delight.

So, in gratitude, we're going to sing the first verse of hymn 836. Just as a response of praise, we get to be here. [Congregation sings 'Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee'.]

Do you feel the difference? That's what we need--to be charged for that energy to be released within us. We're longing for it all the time.

*'I set before you life and prospering...or death and destruction.'* Which will you choose? Yes, *choose life, that you and your descendants may live and thrive. Choose life.*

We must love one another or die. We know that truth like we've never known it before, haven't we? Not even 10 years ago did we understand that like we do today. We must love one another or die.

So, what shall we choose?

Shall we choose to be silent, anonymous consumers, and guilty bystanders?

Or shall we choose to come to life?

Shall we choose one another?

Shall we choose mutuality, and compassion, and wisdom and God in the earth?

The truth is...we'll go on choosing both. It's too risky, isn't it? It's too risky to engage lives of compassion all the time, all the time. But the Good News is that Christ, at a very great cost, has chosen to choose us again, and again, and again, even diving into the depths of hell. And to our despair, and depression, and disaster, and deaths, to bring us back to life. And Christ will not let go--so that we can live, and love, and learn, and be willing to change--again, and again. It's alright. It's how we become human.

The final stanza [of Auden's poem, 'September 1, 1939']:

Defenseless under the night  
Our world in stupor lies;  
Yet, dotted everywhere,  
Ironic points of light  
Flash out wherever the Just  
Exchange their messages (their messages of hope):  
May I, composed like them  
Of Eros and of dust,  
Beleaguered by the same  
Negation and despair,  
(May I) show an affirming flame.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.