

“Freedom to Choose”

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**First Presbyterian Church
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Joshua 24:1-18**

“I’ve had choices, since the day I was born.
There were voices, that told me right from wrong.
If I had listened, I wouldn’t be here today.
Living, Dying with the choices I’ve made.
Livin’ and dyin’ with the choices I’ve made...”

Do you know this great piece of poetry, turned lyrics? I didn’t either, until my extended research brought my attention to an old time favorite song of none other than “George Jones.”

“Living, dying, with the choices I’ve made.” I wonder – did George read about Joshua and his people? Let’s get a little higher brow. No slight meant for George.

How about this poem on the choices you make?

The Road Not Taken By Robert Frost.

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost carries us with his narrative imagery and beauty. The choice of the traveler seen many years hence indeed – “has made all the difference.”

As you all know, we are a people with a wealth of freedoms. Much of the world is envious of such a plethora of freedoms. Not only are we free to choose the roads we travel, we are free to worship as we choose, or not to worship at all. We are free to vote for our representatives who will govern us. We are free to live anywhere in our nation. There are no border patrols between Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

We are free to enter into relationships.

We are free to have children.

We are free to be educated, to read what we wish, to speak our minds.

So much freedom! So many choices!

From my reading of history we are the freest people that have ever lived! (Take a moment to let that sink in.) At this time in history we have choices never imagined in earlier ages.

When you are free you are presented with a wealth of choices. Choices galore! Everyday choices present themselves. Where to travel? What to eat? What to wear. It boggles the mind!

Recently, graduations have taken place; High School, Trade School, College, University, Graduate Studies, and more. Many of you, in your freedom chose, go on to further studies. You “finally” picked a major. You maybe went to grad school. You had so many choices – Architecture, Medicine, Military, Radio, T.V., Law, Teaching, Business, the Arts, Law Enforcement, Photography, Sports... and the list goes on and on and on.

As you well know some choices are of more importance than others. But, you have so many choices! Of immense importance, is the choosing of a spouse. Choose wisely – persevere and grow in love!

Your choice of a profession.

Your choice of a family.

Your choice of a mother-in-law. (Well, there are some limits.)

Many of us are celebrating the graduations of loved ones and friends. They made choices and followed through. They accomplished their goals. I have the joy of attending the high school graduation party of one of our wonderful youth here at First Presbyterian Church this afternoon.

Freedom (a wonderful gift, a right) is not a license to do anything. Freedom must be wedded to making wise and moral choices. “Anything goes” is not a recipe for enhancing your life, or the life of a community. I am in agreement with Fareed Zakaria, author of “The Future of Freedom”. He recognizes that freedom must be guided. All the freedom in the world will not be beneficial, without a vision to make good choices. Constitutional liberty is a must, a precursor to democracy (all that freedom). The protection of individual rights of speech, property, and religion through a system of law is paramount to using our freedoms rightly, and making healthy choices.

Our country, in a sense has its own set of sacred scriptures: The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Of course they must be interpreted, but they are the gatekeepers, protecting us from the oppression of the majority, and the intrusion of aggressive government.

As Christians, we look to the Bible and our history to guide us in our freedoms and our choices. Our national documents reflect much of the content of our religious sacred texts.

So what do we do with all our freedoms? With the offerings of so many choices?

Back in Joshua's time, as he was leading Israel, he put a significant question to them. These people had been living within a polytheistic culture. There were many gods. Gods of this group and that group. Gods of particular locations. Gods here and there, and everywhere. It was time! Ethical Monotheism was gaining strength. Joshua gathered together all the people.

Joshua is about to die. He gives a rousing speech. He proclaims the wondrous events of their past. How Yahweh – called Abraham to leave his home, and go to Canaan; how Yahweh delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery through Moses; how Yahweh brought them to where they are now.

And Joshua, concerned for them, for his people, asks the question:

“What is it going to be?
You've heard the story.
You've shared in our common experience.
What is it going to be?”

“Choose!”

“Choose today whom you will serve!”

- Are you going to serve the old gods of your tradition, back in the old country?
- Are you going to serve the new gods of those around you?
- Or are you going to serve the God that has established certain Laws that enhance life?

A specific God and way of life is being presented. A moral, ethical God that declares laws that include concern for others, justice, mercy and love. This is where Joshua derived his view of life and God.

- Joshua declares – “ As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”
- That's his choice!
- He and his house choose to serve the God that is expansive and moral.

Yes, yes. You have so much freedom. It's dizzying. And there are choices upon choices. But, what is guiding your choices? Something is!

- A worldview of the Biblical development of freedom linked with moral responsibility?

- A worldview that constitutional liberty for all is a must?
- Human freedom and dignity should be our guide through this plethora of freedoms?

Choose this day whom you will serve!

Choose this day whom you will commit to!

Choose this day the vision you will commit to!

- Take great care in exercising your freedoms.
- Take some time to consider what is guiding your choices, and whether that guide is worthy.
- And, commit yourself to your choices. Stand firm. Be resolute.
- Think in these terms.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!

Choose the path that will make all the difference!

Amen.