

Sermon for Trinity 7 (Sunday 10th July 2016) - *Mike Fox*

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

God's Fidelity Assured; Exhortation to Choose Life

Salutation; Paul Thanks God for the Colossians

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Therefore choose life! An exciting, creative, purposeful approach to life that will bring many rewards – well, why not? The alternative is simply to let life pass us by, and none of us would want to do that, would we?

The first reading that we have heard today comes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy and we hear Moses telling his people, the Israelites, that *“the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings”* [Deut.30:9]. Now, if we heard a politician make this claim today: *“Elect me, and I will make you abundantly prosperous in all that you do”*, would you believe him ... or her? We would rightly be suspicious that this could apply to us all and we would also want to know whether this applied to our spiritual or to our material well-being. We may also be suspicious about whether this was for the politician's good, for our own good or for the common good. Whatever our suspicions, we would want to know more – Moses asked God his name, for without that he knew that his message would not be deemed authentic, and God said, rather enigmatically: *“I am who I am”* [Exodus 3:14]. This worldly presence of the Almighty is all that we need in order to focus on, or at least be aware of, Him. Moses acts as a go-between and simply desires to lead the people towards God and for them to respond to God's calling. He claims that they will become abundantly prosperous because of his conviction that this is the sure and certain result of the people *“observing God's commandments”* as they are *“written in this book of the Law”* [Deut.30:10]. Moses wants them to “choose life!”



Alpha & Omega (The First & Last The Beginning & End)
Jehovah (Lord) Yahweh Adonai Prince of Peace King of kings
Lord of lords Messiah Holy Trinity Elohim El Shaddai (God Almighty) Jehovah-Jireh (The Lord will provide)
Jehovah-Rophe (The Lord who heals) Jehovah-Nissi (The Lord our Banner) Jehovah-Shalom (The Lord of Peace)
Jehovah-M'Kaddesh (The Lord who Sanctifies)
Jehovah-Tsidkenu (The Lord our Righteousness) Jehovah-Rohi (The Lord our Shepherd) Jehovah-Shammah (The Lord is there)
Jehovah-Sabaoth (The Lord of Hosts) El-Elyon (Most High)
Abir (Mighty One) Qadosh (Holy One) Shaphat (Judge) El Roi (God of Seeing) Kanna (Jealous) Palet (Deliverer) Gaol (Redeemer) Magen (Shield) Stone Yeshua (Jesus) Eyaluth (Strength) Tsaddiq (Righteous One) El-Elam (Everlasting God)
El-Berith (God of the Covenant) El-Gibhor (Mighty God) Tsur (God our Rock) Melekh (King) Father Emmanuel

Moses is leading his people out of Egypt where they have been enslaved towards the Promised Land. They haven't arrived yet because somehow it takes them 40 years and Moses never makes it to the Promised Land himself. What Moses does do is to act as the channel between God and the Israelite people; he is for ever going up to God and bringing back to the people insights from God himself – they don't always listen and Moses gets very cross when they don't but he does keep on trying. There is a continuing theme throughout the Old Testament about the covenant between God and the Israelites. It is first expressed in the book of Exodus as: *“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.”* [Exodus 6:7] and this reciprocal relationship between God and his people is what Moses is seeking to establish and it recurs again and again throughout scripture.

The important thing about this covenant is that it is here and now. Moses is clear that we don't have to go up to heaven to find it – that gives the lie to the fiery sermons that used to be preached condemning non-believers to that other place. Neither do we have to go across the sea to find it – no, the word is very near, it is right here. In fact, it seems to be suggesting that they don't even need to get to the Promised Land to find it either; it is present in their hearts and all they have to do is to listen – is that being a little unfair on Moses and the Israelites? A bit further on, Moses says:



“choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him” [Deuteronomy 30:19-20] and part of what makes Moses so cross when the people don’t follow God’s commandments is that they get distracted by so many other things; he calls them gods – we might call them “the love of money or possessions or power or even false spiritual practices”, things that can easily lead us astray too. No, we must “choose life”.

Which brings us on to the lawyer who stood up to test Jesus in our gospel reading: “‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” [Luke 10:25] Jesus

asks him what is written in the Law and he replies, correctly, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’” [Luke 10:27] Rather than go through all the ten commandments, as we used to do in the Book of Common Prayer service at 8 o’clock, we use this summary of the Law. Jesus quotes it directly from the Jewish Scriptures which, as a good and well-read Jew, he knew inside out. If you want to look them up, you need to look in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus tells a parable at this point to illustrate what this summary of the law means in practice – we all know the story of the Good Samaritan very well and it is the basis for the good work of the Samaritans in hearing people’s problems and giving them support. We can’t just turn our face to God, however much we declare that we love him in every possible way, without turning our face towards our fellow human being too. It’s certainly helpful that we put ourselves right with God before we attend to our neighbour – we can be more effective that way – but we must beware of “being so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use.” We must choose life both for ourselves and

for those we meet on the way. After being thrown into prison for his other-worldliness, George Fox, the founding father of the Quakers, wrote to his followers: “*And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.*” [Quaker Faith & Practice 19:32]



It is a similar message that Paul has for the Colossians in our other reading this morning; he writes that he and Timothy are praying for the people of the church at Colossae that: “*you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.*” [Colossians 1:9-10] Paul prays that they will both obey the Lord and look after their neighbour. They are being asked to choose life and not just live up to their own potential but support others in living up to their potential too.

I guess many of us will be interested in following the various competitions taking place this afternoon: will Andy Murray achieve his ambition to win Wimbledon again? will Lewis Hamilton be able to win the British Grand Prix? will France or Portugal win Euro 2016? and does it matter

anyway? I would say that it does – any one of those will highlight a burning desire to be the best one can possibly be at your chosen activity; we could put it in terms of being given the ability by our creator and in living to our potential before God. We would hope that they all compete in a fair way, giving each other the opportunity to excel – after all, it is not whether you win or lose that matters, but that you play the game properly. It won't necessarily seem like that to the competitors, but for the good of the sport and for the spectators, that is what is required.

The same is true for elections, or referenda. It is not the winning that matters so much as the way that the policies are presented and the process is followed. If the cases for and against particular candidates or proposals are not declared accurately and clearly, then the result is ill-informed and



neither side can be said truly to have won or lost. But, after the result is known, then the competition ceases and a spirit of co-operation begins. I can well remember an event that we held over thirty years ago now during One World Week. We asked people to come and offer food from a variety of places around the world. Our honoured guest at the event was Patrick Cormack, our previous MP and he made it abundantly clear as he opened the event that, although he stood for a particular brand of politics, he was elected now and was open to every one of his constituents, whatever their views or allegiances. After the tensions of an

election, or a referendum, there needs to be a consolidation from which all parties benefit. You may like to call that “building community”, or in Christian terms, you may like to call it bringing in the Kingdom that Jesus came to establish, but of course it's much wider than that – *God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. [John 3:17].* We need to be inclusive in all our dealings – let us choose life and have it abundantly.

... in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN