

In our Epiphany message series “called by God”, we have considered being

- “Called to be Baptized”
- “Called to be Loved”
- “Called to be United in Christ”
- “Called to love All People”
- “Called to be Sent”
- Next week: “Called to Forgive and Live”
- “Called to be Raised from the Dead”
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- Today: **“Called to Choose Life”**

A few weeks ago, we heard the opening lines of the early apostolic teaching the Didache: There are two ways – the Way of Life and the Way of Death. . .

As human beings, we are always facing that fork in the road – that decision.

And as Christians, we face that decision

as those who belong to Jesus – the first human being who endured death and destroyed it by defeating it.

Jesus did not cheat death – as though somehow by magic he got off the cross without dying.

Jesus did not escape death, only to postpone its inevitability.

Jesus died. His death was certified by his enemies. He was buried – sealed in the tomb.

The sealed tomb was guarded.

But on the first day of the week – Sunday—on the third day from his betrayal – **the seal was broken and the tomb was found empty!**

That same day – and for 40 days – Jesus appeared alive to his friends and followers.

How could this be?

The Holy Spirit that he expired when he breathed his last was given back to him by God the Father.

Jesus risen from the dead is the beginning of God's new creation.

From the first creation,

when the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters and the Word of God created life

and the cosmos came into being,

God chooses life.

- From the creation preserved on Noah's ark,
- to Abram's people chosen to embody divine perfection in their community life,
- to the reconciliation of Joseph's family
- and the remnants restored from exile,
- to the deliverance of Daniel from the lions
- and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace,
- to the birth of Jesus of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
- and the baptism of Saul the persecutor –

God chooses life.

Skeptics will argue that the Bible is full of examples where God sanctions death – through war, punishment, or divine wrath.

And that is true.

But such action is carried out in service to God's greater purpose of life for those in relationship with him.

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The other day, I had a bag of clementines and a few of them had gotten moldy.

In order to preserve most of the fruit, I had to throw away the 3 or 4 moldy ones.

They had to die so that the rest could live, so to speak.

In the circumstances of human life, we cannot always comprehend how God is at work choosing life.

It is hard to see, for example, when a friend or loved one dies unexpectedly.

Or when evil forces seem to get the upper hand.

Or when a treatment doesn't work.

Or when a child is born with devastating deformity.

Because we are not God

and cannot see the big picture from God's point of view,

we are easily confused between what is the consequence of human sin and what is God's doing.

For this reason, it is important that we know and trust God's Word.

When we are faced with incomprehensible things, we turn to Jesus and remember that he is risen from the dead.

Our future has already happened in him.

He has already defeated all the things that lead to death.

Our time is just slower than God's time, so we are still waiting to see this fulfillment with our own eyes.

Living in the conviction that Jesus is risen from the dead and that God chooses eternal life,

even when we do not experience it,

is what we call faith.

As Christians, we face the life and death choices of life in faith – trusting God who chooses life.

We face them as those called to embody Jesus in the world.

Life and death choices are not always physical.

For most of us, most of the time, they are spiritual.

And the hardest ones are both physical and spiritual.

- Whether or not to get out of bed in the morning is a spiritual life or death decision
 - It has to do with how we view God as our creator who gives us purpose in life, a reason to live.

- Whether or not to say something unkind about someone else is both a spiritual and physical life or death choice – as Jesus himself teaches.
 - Not only does it violate God’s will for us,
 - but it also does damage to another person’s soul.

Jesus equates it with physical murder.

Most seminary students hear this instruction during their studies: “A good sermon comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.”

Most good sermons are not considered nice.

Jesus’ sermon on the plain in today’s Gospel is a good sermon, but not a nice one.

To those at the end of their rope, it gives hope.

To the rest of us, it helps us guard against spiritual smugness and the temptation to rely on the comforts of this life for security.

Our standing in this life is no indication of our eternal future.

Our choice between the way of life and the way of death is the indicator.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

by him alone do we come to God the Father.

Jesus is the resurrection and the Life;

whoever trusts in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

By raising Jesus from the dead,

God chooses life for us

so that by the power of the Holy Spirit,
we can choose life for ourselves and others in our decisions.

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Sometimes, choosing the way of life seems like the sacrifice of something good.

Like Jesus on the cross, such sacrifice leads to new life – eternal life.

In Baptism, we have been called by God to choose life and to live as the new creation we are.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Don't miss this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCE8doGQbK8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A5wMA9luzI>