

Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deut. 30:15).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Indeed,
God has set before you life and good.

He *gives*
you life at conception and birth;

He *pours* new life into you at your Baptism;

today He *feeds*
His life into you through the Body and Blood of His Son Jesus Christ who takes
away your sin.

What He
does NOT do is keep you alive against your will.

And whether you
remain alive or end up eternally dead now depends entirely on you.

Now I
know that may surprise you,

for as Lutherans you
rejoice in the absolute assurance from God’s Word that your eternal life and
salvation does NOT depend on anything you do -

and
this is most certainly true!

You

live with the confident hope that life and salvation are yours as pure gift,
purchased and won for you in Christ crucified and risen -

given to you like a free pass to paradise through your
Baptism.

But the
bad news is, you can walk away from that life anytime you want.

You can turn from
your Baptism and the promise of life given there -

You
have that choice.

And
that is the very choice that our OT reading speaks of this morning:

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and
evil.

**If you love the
Lord your God, listen to His Word, and go the way He shows you, then you
will live.**

But if
you turn from God’s Word and blow off the way of life He has provided for your
own good;

if you are not
content to have the things the Lord has given you and insist instead on having
those things He said you must NOT take, then you will die (Deu 30:15-18
paraphrase).”

It’s
the decision you get to make every time temptation rears its ugly head.

It’s the decision you make every time you make a choice
whether or not to sin.

God has given you

life, but you can choose death any time you want.

Now, in
all my years of preaching, I think I've probably had one or two "famous"
sermons...

One began with a joke
(everyone remembers a good joke), the other included an address I offered
before prom night as a metaphor...

Well,
today I've decided to resurrect the prom metaphor!

Granted
- my daughters, John and Jo's sons Ben and Eric, and a host of other young
people are not sitting in the second pew the way they were the first time I
offered this,

but it should still serve our purpose!

You
see, in the beginning, God gave us the breath of life and said,

"I have given it all for you - the plants, the animals, the
birds and fish...

the
perfect mate in the perfect vacation spot -

Have
a blast, kids - it's all yours!

Just don't take what
has not been given to you, and everything will be good."

You
remember Genesis 1 and 2, right?

The starting point is
pure gift, blessing, abundance beyond our wildest imagination -

It's
ALL good at the start.

But now
that the man and woman are given life, they have a choice, don't they...

They can **hear**
God's Word, trust God's Word, and remain in God's Word for the
wonderful life
He gives,

OR... they can give
ear to Satan's competitive word, take what the devil offers, and suffer the
deadly consequences.

Seems
like a no-brainer, right?

And yet, given this
choice between perfect life and certain death, Adam and Eve choose poorly.

They
reject God's Word -

they take the thing
they were TOLD would hurt them,

and they broke their
Father's heart and walked straight out of paradise and straight into hell -

the
same thing YOU do every time YOU sin.

Which
brings me to prom night.

For
there are many things our young Adams and Eves have in common with the first
Adam and Eve -

Fathers who love them and want the best for them -

a
whole world wide open to them -

a young man and a
young woman in paradise, nothing but given to:

fine
clothes, fine food, fine music, good times... Pure gift.

On prom
night, like that first day in the Garden of Eden, this young man and young
woman are given the world on a silver platter.

And they are told by their father to have a good time,

to
rejoice in all these great things they have received,

and
not to ruin it by doing the things that can hurt them.

And as
our young Adams and Eves walk out the door, corsages in hand, tuxes in tow,
the choice is now theirs -

**Remember their
father's words, trust that what he says is true, and rejoice in the gifts he
has given so that they leave the forbidden things alone,**

or give ear to the
devil, take the forbidden fruit, and suffer the consequences.

What do
they do? They can do whatever they want! They have set before them life and
good, death and evil...

They can ignore their father's word and go their own way.

They can turn from
the wonderful things they have been given to grasp hold of the very things that

are forbidden.

They

can actually enslave themselves to the prince of this world, giving in to peer pressure or whatever you want to call it that offers its bent and twisted temptations in a way that actually makes them look cool -

a little vodka in the
punch,

maybe

a hit of coke in the men's room,

perhaps even a

little sex at the end of the night if they're "really lucky..."

They

reject their father's word,

they take the things they were told would hurt them,

and they break their

parent's hearts as they walk right out of paradise and straight into hell without even realizing the terrible mistakes they are making.

Now,

Lord knows we all love our children.

Lord knows we want

them to choose wisely and to be content with the wonderful gifts that we have given them.

And

as we see in our reading today,

God our Father feels

exactly the same way about each and every one of you.

For God

does indeed love you as His own dear children -

He has given you life, provided for your every need,

and now He wants

nothing more than for you to fear, love, and trust in Him, to receive the gifts He gives, and to have a blast.

But

with the gift comes the choice:

You can Love God, walk

in His ways, keep His commandments, and live (Deu 30:16),

OR... you can turn

your hearts away, refuse His Word for your life, and follow whatever little god floats your boat -

money,

pleasure, drunkenness, sex, popularity, whatever.

You are

free to chose what you feel is right for you, regardless of what God's Word says -

And THAT is the terrible choice that is always yours to make!

You

want to take up homosexuality as a life-style? Nobody's stopping you. In fact, the world is on your side.

You want an abortion?

Get one - that is your right according to the law of the land.

You want to have sex

with your girlfriend, get stoned, cheat on your exams? Be my guest!

Buy all

the porn you can get your hands on, get drunk, gossip away, curse a blue streak...

You can have death any way you want it, any time you want it.

That

is, after all, what sin is.

Sin
is death, body and soul, pure and simple.

And
it breaks your Father's heart.

So why
go there? God chose life for you -

In fact, even after
Adam and Eve chose sin and death for the world, God has *still* chosen
life for you!

He promised to
reverse the curse, to rescue you from death, to destroy the devil,

and
to deliver you back to the life for which we were created.

And all
this He did only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy,

without any merit or worthiness in you.

Rather
than handing you over to the beating, the grounding, even the very hell you
deserved,

He sent His Son Jesus to save you from that.

He
paid the price *for* you.

He cleaned up your mess.

He gathered
all the deadly, bitter consequences of all those terrible things you have said
and done,

and He pounded them
back into the devil's skull on Golgotha.

By His
death on the cross, Jesus buried your sin in that hell so that you could be
free to enjoy the life for which you were created -

the life He poured
out in your Baptism, your Confirmation,

your
new birth, your "new genesis..."

You
don't *have* to walk in the way of darkness anymore.

You don't *have* to go the way of death to max out your
enjoyment of life!

Not only that, but
as a child of God, like the children of any other good family,

you
actually get to help *others* steer clear of their bad decisions.

When
you live in the peace and joy that come with being content in having all the
blessings of God, people will notice -

And they will come to
you with their broken lives and the terrible consequences of their deadly
decisions...

And *you* can
show them the way back to life.

You can be a
part of the solution in this fallen world, and not a part of the problem!

"Therefore
choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God,

obeying His voice and holding fast to Him,

for He is your life

and length of days, that you may dwell in the land of the LORD” (Deu 30:19-20)

-

In

the name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon text: Deuteronomy 30:15-20