

August 3

## Making Choices

Hosea 11.1-11, Colossians 3.1-11, Luke 12.13-21

Today's readings set choices before us. Who should we be? How should we live?

Our thoughts, words and actions shape our lives and also our identities.

Our actions don't just affect others, they also affect ourselves.

This is not a new idea

Deuteronomy 30:19 says, *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.*

Our choices are not just named, they are lived and they have consequences, for good or for ill, for ourselves and for others.

Do these lines from a famous movie strike a chord with you?

**Sherif Ali:** *Wadi Safra is another day from here. You will not find it, and you will die.*

**T. E. Lawrence:** *I will find it with this.*

**Sherif Ali:** *Good army compass. How if I take it?*

**T. E. Lawrence:** *Then you would be a thief.*

Free will is a gift from God. It is like the gift of a wood-working tool. With it, we shape our surroundings and ourselves. Do we set out with a plan and a goal, or do we hammer or saw or chisel a bit here and a bit there and see what emerges?

They say that if you give a three-year-old a hammer, suddenly a lot of things need hammering. Unfortunately, that does not necessarily result in a lot of well-crafted objects.

Shaping wood, like shaping our lives, involves envisioning, planning, working, continuous assessment, and continuous adjustment as we shape the process.

Who has re-shaped some physical thing – perhaps made a bookshelf, restored a motorbike, planted or re-planted a garden? Did you have a plan or a series of mini-plans as possibilities emerged? Did the result match your first thoughts and intentions? What is your experience? [...]

My life is not what I envisaged at different earlier stages, but all those stages have led me to where I am. I still need to continue that process of exploring what is life-giving, for myself and for others. What leads me to the fullness and abundance of living as Jesus taught, and what is a distraction, a side-road, a misstep or a contradiction of purpose?

The letter to the Colossians says, *If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

The secular world is full of messages about what matters and who we should be. Many, if not most, of those messages can look like the real deal, but ultimately mislead us from our true purpose.

Our Gospel reading tells of a man who pursued greed, self-interest, and material wealth. These things were more important to him than his relationship with God and his relationship with his family and his community. People do not always deliberately decide to be greedy or self-serving. This man may have thought, or told himself, that his purpose was to be hard-working and forward-thinking, making wise and responsible provision for the future. The man who wanted to control his brother's actions may also have thought, or told himself, that his quest was for justice and fairness in family life. Are these self-assessments truth or self-deception and self-justification?

How should we test our assumptions about ourselves and our own motivation? The readings from Hosea and Colossians remind us to lift our eyes and our hearts beyond the concerns of our earthly self and our earthly lives to look to the guidance of our heavenly Father and the example of Jesus.

God made us for this life and told us how best to live in ways that are life-giving for us and for others. The words of the prophet Hosea tell of a people, God's people, who have the guidance of a loving heavenly parent who knows what is best for them, who knows what will give them thriving, abundant lives. But they went astray, thinking that they knew better. God was always ready with both correction and loving patience, calling them back home and back to the lives that they were meant to live.

Human nature has not changed a lot over the years. We have only to look at Paul's words to the Colossians and to look at our own lives.

Jesus showed us what it looked like to live in God's ways and to care for one another. The idolatry that Paul condemns is essentially putting our own self-interest or self-indulgence above the life revealed in Christ.

This is the true life that will bring us back to our true selves. The life that lures us away promises pleasure but delivers only idolatry, which is putting other things before God. Sometimes the idol that we put before God is ourselves, so we become self-indulgent, self-worshipping idolators. This never can, and never does, bring us the life that we crave. Paul warns us to put aside this selfish living that creates a false and self-damaging life and to take the new life in Christ that brings us closer to God and closer to one another.

Reforming the whole of our life and all our thoughts, words and actions is a big task. Our heads and hearts and lifestyles are like the dwelling place of a hoarder. We know what we truly want and need, but find it hard to let go of the things of little or no worth that hold us back. How shall we declutter the mind and soul and rid ourselves of such things?

It is easier to make progress when we have our eyes on the goal.

We can say to ourselves: *I am building a cathedral*, not *I am laying bricks*. *I am making order, space and light in my life*, not *I am dealing with all this mess*.

We can find our encouragement in Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus – keep your eye on the ball, keep your focus and direction.

Perhaps we might make use of our baptism vows to renew our commitment to Christ.  
(APBA p. 56)

In the words from the service of baptism, As brothers and sisters who respond to Christ, will you support one another in this calling?

[Response: **We will.**]

Thanks be to God.

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