

Choose Life!

King of Glory Lutheran
God's Work our Hands
September 6-7, 2025

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall certainly perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him, for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus], and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

Martin Luther, German theologian and pastor said it this way. “God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.”ⁱ

Elise Egbert (from Trinity Lutheran in Owatonna), (returned at the end of July) to the US after spending a year in Hungary through the [Young Adults in Global Mission \(YAGM\) program](#). YAGM is a program in the ELCA for young adults to

spend 10 months abroad in service with companion churches and organizations. She writes this. “Over this past year, I was blessed to be able to accompany the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary in the small town of Szarvas in the southeastern part of the country.” Although not a teacher, Elise helped teach English at two Lutheran schools. She played trumpet in brass ensemble, sang in the Luther’s Roses choir.

“Perhaps the most challenging part of my year, though, was knowing that I’d have to come home. My YAGM year was not a vacation - it was a year of building relationships that I had to leave behind. I didn’t go to Szarvas to do what some may think of as traditional mission work either - I didn’t go there to save people, I didn’t go there to bring God (as God is surely already everywhere), I didn’t even really go there to teach English. My “job” in Szarvas was to be in accompaniment with siblings in Christ, to learn from them, and to be in relationship with them. I can only hope that I was able to give back a fraction of what the community of Szarvas gave to me.”ⁱⁱ

Surely before and during the application process to become a Young Adult in Global Mission, she took time to count the costs. Perhaps she asked questions like, what would it mean to be in a foreign country away from family and friends? How would she learn one of the five hardest languages for native English speakers? Was God calling her to take on this adventure?

Jesus tells a story about a not being able to finish a building project or the possibility of winning a war with less troops than your opponent. He is asking us to examine our priorities, allegiances, responsibilities, and our stuff! As each of these can call us away from following God’s call on our lives. Carrying His cross and following Him is nearly impossible, Jesus says. Yet, because of His gift of grace from dying on the cross, we can walk in confidence and hope that a life of commitment to God is truly possible.

Our two scriptures for today are really about freedom from and freedom for. In the Deuteronomy passage, Moses addresses the people as they prepare to enter the land God promised to their ancestors. Within a larger conversation about covenant and God’s faithfulness, Moses urges the people to choose the way of God, which is the way of life and prosperity. This is what God intends for God’s people, and it is characterized by love for God (which is intertwined with love for neighbor), obedience to God’s laws and connection to God, “holding fast to him” (v. 20).

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Moses is asking the people to reflect upon choosing life or choosing death. In other words, Moses tells the people, they are free to choose bondage to God and life or bondage to sin and death. Either way they will be bound to something.ⁱⁱⁱ

If you are married, you were able to freely choose your partner. Yet within that marriage covenant, you and your partner are bound to one another. That commitment brings both great joy and great challenges. The same is true of our life with God. Being bound to God by loving God and loving neighbor brings incredible joys and challenges.

This weekend we have the freedom to choose to participate in God’s Work our Hands projects. Many of us did make this choice. Even if we won’t be able to, we know we make that same choice each and every day. Within our families, our friends, other community members, God gives us the freedom to choose life for ourselves and life for others. By loving God and serving God, we are freed from ourselves...our pride, our slavery to our own agenda, and freed for God’s use in the kingdom.’

John Kuhlen, member of our church, told me this story. He was living in Albuquerque, NM, driving in a not great part of town. A man flagged him down on the street; a man that didn’t look very trustworthy. John wondered whether he ought to stop, as he was on his own way to a job interview. But it felt like God needed him to stop, so John pulled over to the sidewalk; a little suspicious of what might happen next.

“Man, can you give me a ride? I really need your help! I’m late for work and my car broke down. If I don’t get to this job I might lose it. I really need the income. Please, please can you just give me a ride?” he pleaded with John.

Again, John wondered if the man was packing, if he would be safe, and how far away this guy needed to go, as he himself didn’t want to miss his own interview.

John agreed and the man directed John to drive into a far sketchier part of town. John knew he was out of his element. But they got to a job construction site and as the man got out of the car, John kindly said, “Have a good day!” As the words came out, and John saw all the other guys at the work site, he thought, “Oh no. What if they all come and mob me, take the car or worse?!”

The man turned around and said, “It’s already a good day. You gave me a ride.” While I’m not advocating always picking up strangers, John had a choice, counted the cost and God blessed it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian and pastor, lived a life in freedom devoted to God. He asked this, “Must the Christian go around looking for a cross to bear, seeking to suffer? No. Opportunities for bearing crosses will occur along life's way and all that is required is the willingness to act when the time comes. The needs of the neighbor, especially those of the weak and downtrodden, the victimized and the persecuted, the ill and the lonely, will become abundantly evident.”^{iv} "Bonhoeffer (also) thought of death as the last station on the road to freedom."^v

Some forty years after Bonhoeffer’s death, near the end of the Cold War, this was happening. ‘Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Christians faced explicit cost in a Communist-controlled Germany. Some had to choose between being confirmed as Christians or joining the Communist Party. If they chose confirmation, it could mean not attending university or participating fully in civic life.’ If it were today, what choice would we make?

As I said at the beginning of the sermon, a life following Jesus is almost impossible. Yet because God chose to be incarnate, to live His life in loving service to others, then died for us, that gift of grace is our freedom to continue loving God and others.

In Christ, freedom comes from letting go. Freedom comes through giving away and trusting Jesus. In Christ we are free people. Free to choose life, free to choose faithfulness, and free to open our arms wide and receive the free grace of God. How shall we let go of ourselves this day, to choose life and be free in Christ? Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/510368>

ⁱⁱ <https://semnsynod.org/news/bright-spot-elyses-yagm-story>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>)

^{iv} [/www.azquotes.com/quote/568467?ref=Bonhoeffer](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/568467?ref=Bonhoeffer)

^v Eric Metaxas (2011). “Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy”, p.358, Thomas Nelson Inc