

“Choose Life!”

The Jewish exiles in Babylon, who were the original audience of today’s Scripture, needed guidance and encouragement toward the conclusion of their 50 years of exile. That was needed to prevent them from falling into the pattern of worshipping other gods, which previously resulted in the Jews experiencing a broken relationship with God. So, toward the conclusion of Moses’ final address to the Children of Israel, the scholar authors put in Moses’ mouth in **verse 15**, *“Today I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death.”* That verse raised two important concerns with reference to the peoples’ and our choice. **What does it mean to choose Life? And, how do we live out that Life in our daily lives?**

As I was doing research for this message, I came across a video, which helps us respond to those two questions. This video starts off as a “show and tell” type of presentation. The item shown is a bit unusual and perhaps jolting but the video’s message exposes a very current and troubling behavior. The behavior discussed in the video, as related to the Letter of James, is one people follow when one chooses to go the way of death over and against the Life God offers us – calls us to live. As the speaker in the video reveals the negative aspects of that behavior, I urge you to think about how you have practiced such behavior and how it has been publicly demonstrated recently. [*“The Tongue”* video was shown.]

Has what you said to or about someone else caused your or another person’s New Life in Christ to suffer? Has your speech or words encouraged death? Have you witnessed someone functioning in a bullying and derogatory fashion? During these past few weeks, there was a very prominent person, who spoke in belittling and demeaning ways about others. He called a Federal Judge, who had ruled in a way he didn’t like a “so called judge”. Before they issued their ruling, he insinuated the three Federal Judges, who served on the Appeals Court, were not as smart as, “A bad high school student” and he said about the hearing over which they presided, “I listened to a bunch of stuff last night on television that was disgraceful”. Those comments were very destructive toward the Justice system of the United States of America and as the video suggested, they go against the Life God wants for all people – the New Life in Christ – the Life of respect and agape love.

On this Love Sunday – Agape Love Sunday, it is very important that we remember we are offered and called – are able to choose – to Live the New Life in Christ – to follow his example of self-giving and sacrificial agape love in the way we treat and relate to all people. Let’s also recall, Jesus explained the two greatest commandments are to agape love God with all you have and are and agape love your neighbor as yourself.

The following video, like the one shown for the children, is also based on 1 Corinthians 13. It's conclusion reminds us about how important it is to God for us to receive the New Life in Christ – to Live Agape Love. [The “*Love Is Patient*” video was shown.]

Our Scripture Reading concludes in verses 19-20a, ***“I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God’s blessing and God’s curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life. Love the Lord your God, obey Him and be faithful to Him”***. As Jesus testified, we are to Agape Love God. But in addition to saying the second most important commandment is to agape love your neighbor as yourself, Jesus also taught we love God by the way we love one another.

So, how do we Choose Life? As that last video reminded us, we need to grasp, live, and share agape love with others. As I mentioned to the children, Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan makes it is clear, loving our neighbors includes everyone – especially persons, who have been rejected and abused by others. So, instead of calling someone names, we are to manifest God’s Agape Love shown in Jesus Christ! That is why we became a “God Is Still Speaking” Congregation, which seeks to offer God’s Agape Love to all people.

We are committed to Living Out Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward everyone, especially with anyone, who has experienced fear and/or rejection because of who she or he is. We are not only to treat everyone with that agape love and radical, extravagant hospitality but we are also called to get the message out! A not so hidden truth is guests are more likely to come to our Worship Celebrations and other activities, if a member or friend invites them. Further, very few guests, who are not invited by a member or friend, come because they found us in the yellow pages. Most guests find us because of something they discovered about Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, on the internet. We need to widen our visibility. I urge each of us to put the decal in our bulletins on our car windows. Additionally, on an ongoing and frequent basis, use your social media resources to communicate we are a God Is Still Speaking church. Each week, following Women’s Sunday, we will send out a brief statement connecting the upcoming sermon with our God Is Still Speaking message. I urge you to tweet out, post on Facebook, etc. – each week’s statement. Emily Wilson, one of our Deacons, can help you get started.

We are called to Choose between Life and Death. Jesus provided the ultimate example of choosing Life in his living out God’s Agape Love. Let’s answer the call to make a choice by choosing to welcome and share God’s Agape Love with all people! Amen.