

And Moses said, “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life..”

It seems like an easy enough choice. Life = prosperity and blessings. Death = adversity and curses. Follow the Lord God and know life.

Now, if the path through life was clearly marked with sign posts which said “life + blessings” to the right and “death and curses” to the left, well, who wouldn’t go right? But as my mother taught me, the devil is always in the details.

Because sometimes, the very thing which looks like a blessing at first turns out to be an unbearable curse in the end. Think about King Midas here.

Now we could think that ‘choosing life’ means having our own leisure, ease and comfort – even though such a life can lead to heart disease. On the other hand, death might look like struggle and loss, sweat and tears, yet these are the very things we need to build something lasting. So, how do we discern the right path? Good question.

The other evening I watched Serena Williams play tennis in the 3rd round of the US Open tournament at age 41. Serena is probably the best female tennis player of all time. She didn’t get there, and stay there all this time by taking it easy. Her technique was honed on the practice courts where she trained; she put in the hours, and faced down the pressure and adversity.

Her achievements are manifold, but her lasting contribution is to the tennis community, the hundreds of players who have learned from her. She has changed the game of tennis for women.

This is what 'choosing life' looks like: hard work that benefits yourself but also others. When Moses encouraged the Israelites to 'choose life' he was talking about something bigger than the simple existence of individuals.

He was talking about the flourishing of an entire community, flourishing through the giving and receiving of each individual to the benefit of the whole, flourishing that was built on living out the love that God had shown them.

Moses pressed his people to follow after their God = a path that brings life to all people. Moses knew it wouldn't be easy – it's not easy to DO and it's not easy to DISCERN exactly what the path of life looks like.

Why? Because life is complicated. Because we get tired. We get lazy. and distracted – by bright shiny things like gold baubles or large trophies or sleek possessions.

We are drawn away from the hard choices which are demanded when we choose life for all God's people, because choosing life means standing against oppression.

Yet this is the message that comes to us across the millennia: we love God by loving others. We serve God by serving others. Whether it is Moses or Jesus teaching, the message is the same: to love God is to love others – and the path to true life lies in our God.

Because, of course, there are other "gods" that we **could** serve, there are other choices that **could** be made, and they have their own outcomes. Not all things flourish.

If we serve consumption as our god– the manufacture and acquisition of material goods, we allow the environment to suffer.

If we serve wealth as a god, we allow the poor to suffer.

If we serve pride and our own security, we break relationships with neighbors and leave them without protection.

We might cry out to God to bring justice, but as the people of God it's our task to work for the very justice we seek. There are systems close to home which do not serve our weak and powerless neighbors. What are we doing to 'choose life' for them?

Choosing life means choosing life for all – just as God has chosen to love and serve 'all'. That is Jesus' call to us as disciples.

....to use our tools as citizens to insist that elected officials **build equitable communities** and not simply **serve narrow interest groups? To insist that ALL are accounted for.....because**

Until every hungry person is fed our work isn't done.

Until every worker is paid fair wages, our work isn't done.

Until every person stopped by the police is safe enough to pay their traffic ticket with a check and not with their life, our work isn't done.

Until every child born is loved and nourished, our work isn't done.

In following Jesus, we pick up the work that he set before us, continuing to love God by loving our neighbors and building communities where all people are included and everyone flourishes. In following Jesus we seek out the weak and the lost so they are not forgotten.

The Christian life is not just about thinking loving thoughts and sincerely believing in Jesus, but in serving God by

serving our neighbors. We follow Jesus when we pick up HIS cross of love and continue to carry it forward in his name.

That is what it looks like to 'choose life' – and although the path forward is rocky and arduous, Jesus has gone before us and now calls us to follow.

I'm a little frightened by all this and feeling terribly inadequate, but God's love for each of us in Jesus never fails, and I have leaned on that love innumerable times in my life. So as I hear the call to choose life, not just for myself, but for ALL of God's beloved creation, I will lean on God's love for me once again.

But I will also continue to work in the food pantry and collect winter coats for those in need and write to my congress person about legislation.

Because to love God is to love my neighbor and to serve God is to serve my neighbor.

The path of love is the path of life. Choose life.