

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

Choices

Moses has led the Israelites for 40 years – out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness. Now, as they prepare to enter the Promised Land, he places a stark choice before them: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.” The same choice is presented to us: “Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster” (*NLT*). Faced with those options, our instinctive answer seems obvious. But what do these choices truly mean? What does it mean to choose life or to choose death?

It’s not as simple as clicking a “life” button and moving on with our day. Moses explains that we choose life “by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances.” Life is chosen by “loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him.” Choosing life begins with loving God. Remember the first and greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Loving God isn’t merely an intellectual decision or an emotional response. It engages the whole of who we are – heart and mind, will and body. It encompasses every part of our lives. And let’s be honest: this isn’t always easy. There are moments when I’d much prefer to leave God out of the equation. But whenever I do – whether it concerns a relationship, my work or leisure, my use of money, or my talents and time – I wander from the first and greatest commandment. In doing so, I begin to choose death rather than life.

Moses reinforces this by warning the people against turning to other gods, for that path leads only to destruction.

What, then, do we make of this business of “other gods”?

Let me put it another way:

What are the top priorities in your life?

What captures the greatest share of your attention?

Where does your deepest loyalty lie?

What matters most?

I wonder... what came to mind? Chances are, the things we list are good and worthy. But if God doesn’t stand at the top of that list, then those other things – however worthy – have become gods to us. That’s Moses’ point: God must be the overriding priority. And this isn’t about Sunday attendance; it’s about relationship – a relationship meant to permeate every part of our lives.

The entire story of Scripture is about God’s relationship with humanity. Again and again we discover that we are God’s number one priority. God loves each of us – whoever we are, wherever we come from. And God desires to be first in our lives. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the first and greatest commandment.”

If you’re anything like me, you’ll know how often we struggle with this. That’s why forgiveness and grace loom so large in God’s relationship with us. God continually invites us to turn back, to place God once more at the centre of our lives. And when we do, we begin to taste the “life” Moses speaks of. It reshapes how we live. It transforms how we relate to others. It moves us to care for the hurting, to treat people with dignity, to act out of something deeper than self-interest. Choosing life means allowing God’s love for us – and our love for God – to shape everything.

Interestingly, the passage doesn't tell us how the Israelites responded to Moses. But perhaps that's intentional. It leaves the question open – so that we may respond today.

Our New Testament reading offers an example of this choice being lived out – or not lived out – in the early church. The Christians in Corinth were rather spiritually immature, and it showed in how they treated one another. They quarrelled, they were jealous, and they divided into factions, each claiming loyalty to a different leader and believing themselves superior to the rest. So Paul reminds them: the church belongs to God, not to any human leader. And our relationship with God is revealed in our relationships with others. If someone is quarrelsome and divisive, it's a pretty strong sign that God isn't their first priority.

Many people base their morality primarily on what society requires. But when no one is watching, those external laws lose their power. Rules alone don't change us. Jesus desires for something far deeper – a transformation that begins when we experience the love of God. For Christians, obeying God isn't about ticking off commandments; it's about living out of the love we've received.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus takes us beyond a morality of rule-keeping into a life shaped by love. Avoiding murder has never been a particular challenge for me – but avoiding anger, resentment, and insults, even if only in the privacy of my own thoughts, is another matter entirely. And Jesus tells us that such attitudes lie close to the heart of murder.

Does that mean we're forbidden ever to feel angry? No. Anger is part of being human. When directed at injustice, it can motivate us to work for what is right. But the specific word Jesus uses describes a very different kind of anger – an anger that broods, festers, and desires revenge; an anger that despises and dehumanises another person.

Such attitudes lie at the root of all violence. Murderers, like all abusers, treat others as objects to be used. When we indulge in that corrosive anger, we diminish others – and we diminish ourselves, ceasing to reflect the person God created us to be.

Jesus offers a different way: seek reconciliation. Simple words, but not simple work. Reconciliation requires stepping down from our pedestal, relinquishing the illusion of superiority, and standing on level ground with those we've wronged or who have wronged us. As Tom Wright puts it, "Genuine humans don't live on pedestals; they have their feet on the ground, on a level with everyone else." And again we hear Moses: our choices reveal whether our lives are truly grounded in love for God. If we will not seek reconciliation, we haven't made God our number one priority.

The same is true of Jesus' teaching about adultery, lust, divorce, and swearing falsely. He's not laying down a new list of rules; he's describing a radically different way of relating. We don't use people for our own ends – not in our actions, not in our words, not even in our thoughts. Instead, we seek to see and honour others as God sees and honours them – as people to be cherished and loved.

So the choice still stands before us: life or death. And choosing life means loving the Lord our God. This is the law that truly matters – not an external framework, but a love that permeates our being, reshaping our intentions, healing our relationships, and guiding our steps.

May the Spirit of God – who is love – continue to work within us, transforming us day by day into the people God has called us to be.

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Waiapu Cathedral – 15.2.2026*