

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**February 12, 2017**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

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**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

*Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, . . .* (Deuteronomy 30:20 N.R.S.V.)

## Choose Life

In one of the Indiana Jones action movies, Jones, an archeologist, is searching for the holy grail. According to legend, the holy grail is the cup or chalice that Jesus drank out of at the last supper. Again according to legend, anyone who is sick or wounded who drinks from this holy grail will be instantly healed. The stories say that the holy grail was smuggled out of the holy land by a group of Christian knights and that no one knows where they took it.

In the movie, Indiana Jones is not the only one looking for the lost chalice. A group of Hitler's Nazi soldiers are also desperate to get their hands on this lost relic. As it happens, Jones and the Nazi officer arrive at the cave containing the holy grail at the same time. There they encounter the ghost of an old knight still guarding the holy grail. He tells them that they can take the holy grail out of the cave, but first they must choose the right chalice and drink from it.

The old knight indicates a shelf with thirty or forty chalices. The chalices are made of every different design and material. Many of them are highly polished silver or gold inlaid with precious gemstones. The Nazi Officer runs to the shelf to make the first choice. He chooses an elaborate golden chalice encrusted with jewels. Dipping the chalice into some water, he drinks.

He smiles as he swallows, then suddenly light explodes from his eyes, nose, and mouth. In the space of a few seconds he ages 1000 years and falls to the ground as a pile of dust. His chosen chalice also hits the floor and rolls away. Into the silence the old knight says, "He chose . . . poorly."

Indiana Jones hesitates for a second, but he is desperate for the chalice. Jones' father has been mortally wounded and a drink from the holy grail is only chance of survival. Jones approaches the shelf of chalices muttering to himself. "A simple carpenter would not have a drink from a silver or gold cup." Jones selects a simple wooden cup. He says, "This is the cup of a carpenter." Quickly Jones fills the cup with water and takes a small sip. A few seconds pass and nothing bad happens. The old knight says, "You chose wisely."

Jones rushes from the cave and is able to save his father, but then the cup is lost again in the earthquake that follows.

The point is that life is full of choices. God designed us that way. If you think about it, being granted the ability to make choices is a measure of trust. If you have ever worked for a boss who made you responsible for all kinds of things, but didn't trust you with the authority to make decisions, you know what I mean.

In the very beginning, God gave us the ability to choose. God put Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden that would provide everything they needed to survive and live well. But he also placed a tree in the center of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told his children that they could eat of any of the trees in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God trusted his children with the choice of eating from the forbidden tree or not. It was a choice between life and death. As we know, Adam and Eve chose . . . poorly. They chose to sin. And every generation after them has also chosen to sin.

In our text from Deuteronomy, the Israelites are about to enter the holy land. God knows that they will be tempted to follow the ways of the Canaanites and worship idols. So God has Moses tell them that they are facing a choice of life or death. Following God and obeying God's commandments leads to life. Ignoring God's commandments and worshiping idols leads to death. Moses urges them to choose life.

Now here is the thing, this seems like a no brainer. Given this choice, who would ever choose death? Well, Adam and Eve did. So did the Israelites on many occasions. And so do modern people. It has been 50 years now that cigarettes have had this warning on every pack, "Warning the Surgeon General Has Determined that Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to your Health." We know that cigarette smoking increases your risk of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and other life threatening diseases. We know that yet many of us still chose to smoke. While there are not as many teenagers choosing to take up smoking today - maybe teenagers today are smarter than we were- but some still chose to take up the habit.

Some of us chose to eat more than is good for us. Some of us choose to neglect physical exercise. Some of us abuse alcohol and other drugs. Who in the world would choose death over life. Millions of people do it every day.

God has not only entrusted us with the freedom to choose for ourselves. God has made it so that we must choose. Some people try to avoid this danger by putting off making a choice. But the decision to not make a choice is still a decision.

Trying to put off the choices of life or death is also dangerous. I read about a man who was driving home from work. He came to a fork in the road. He knew that down the right road was his favorite bar and down the left road was his home. He knew he should just go on home, but he also wanted a drink. So he started first down one road, and then the other, until he ended up crashing into a tree that was planted in the middle of the fork.

Choosing life requires us to be decisive. We won't get there by default. We won't get there by putting off this important decision. We know that every great leader the world has ever known had this one great trait. They were decisive. They made the choices and they moved forward.

There was a cartoon showing a homeless man walking down the street carrying a sign. The sign said, "Keeping my options open."

God not only gives us the freedom to choose, but he also will not allow us to duck this responsibility. Choose life!

While we have the freedom to choose, we also have to live with the consequences of those choices. I read a true account of a couple of a car that was pulled over by the police. The police officer determined that the driver was under the influence of alcohol and was going to jail. The officer asked the drunk driver if he wanted his passenger to drive his car home. Sure. So the officer asked the passenger for his driver's license. The passenger handed over his driver's license, and low and behold, he was wanted for a warrant.

How stupid can you get? Instead of just walking home, this guy, knowing that there was a warrant out for his arrest, voluntarily handed over his license. He chose . . . poorly.

The good news is that God forgives us our sins when we ask. But God does not suspend the law of consequences. Over time, we reap what we sow.

Moses says to the people, I put before you life or death. Choose life!

The most important decision that we modern people can make is to choose to follow Christ as our Lord and our Savior. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." Millions of people the world over have discovered following Jesus Christ makes life worth living.

If you haven't discovered that for yourself, I invite you to talk to me after the service.

Let me talk a bit more about that decision to choose life and follow Christ. Many people have the mistaken notion that this is just one really big decision and then you never have to decide again. You know the ones that I am talking about. They want a ticket into heaven, not a life of service and love. They want a little bit of fire insurance, but not enough to change the way they live.

Yes, there is for many people a big starting decision. However, for all of us, the decision to follow Christ is lived out in the many little decisions we make every day of our lives. That is both glorious and hard at the same time.

It is glorious in that God does not simply take over our lives and make us into some sort of robots. He continues to trust us with decisions. Yet that very trust and freedom demand a lot from us. I know one fellow who said, "I think it would be easier to give all my money to God at once and be done with it, rather than have to make the decision to give over and over again. He said, "Sometimes, I feel like I am being nicked and dined to death by God."

Remember how the apostle Peter had decided to follow Jesus. He followed him around for three years. When Jesus asked him, Peter said that he was ready to die for him. Yet in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter suddenly decided to play it safe and deny that he even knew Jesus.

The life of the Christian is not just one big decision. It is the decision to follow Christ, to choose life every day. The good news is that even when we fail, Christ offers forgiveness, and new start. Peter chose poorly in the courtyard that night, but Christ forgave him and made him a great apostle.

Living is full of decisions, big and small. Some decisions lead to life. Some decisions lead to death. Choose carefully. Choose wisely. Choose life!