

## **Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost. 12 November 2017. Choices.**

Choices. We all make them. Some good. Some bad. Some we look back on and regret. Some sustain us for a lifetime.

Choices can have colours and hues, shades and texture.

There are light pastel choices. The easy choices. The ones that sit lightly and which we don't have to agonise over very deeply. Ordering lunch can be like that, unless of course menu envy kicks in!

There are choices with harsher colours and rough textures too. The ones that we find grating on our minds. The choices we wrestle with. The hard decisions where there is nothing easy and it seems that whatever we choose it has a cost, a heavy cost.

There are some black choices. Choices made in despair or under desperate pressure. Choices we would rather not have to make because they suck all the life out of us simply making that choice. Those choices are hard.

There are choices with passionate colours, choices which light up a fire within us, choices which touch on our deepest desires and our deepest hopes and dreams and the things which inspire us and give us enormous energy.

There are green growth choices, the sort of choices which are building blocks of our lives, the sort which lead to more and more opportunities opening up before us. For me, the choice to be here is a green choice.

There are some which are silly choices, more a mish-mash pattern than an actual colour. The things that we do unthinkingly which may or may not resolve into patterns which are dead ends or from which we escape with only minor consequences.

And there are the choices we shouldn't make but we all do. They may be yellow. They are often murky and clouded with fear and mixed emotions and confusion and prejudice and ignorance.

There are stark white choices too. Times when what comes is so dazzling that it can seem almost as if we are being chosen and taken on a path rather than choosing for ourselves.

And some choices are pure gold. Opportunities and invitations to connect with LIFE in ways which complete us. They are not without cost. Choices by their very nature are forks in the road, the exclusion of some options by going in one direction rather than another. But some choices are pure gold.

The Gospel reading today (Matthew 25:10-13) is a warning against mish-mash silly thoughtless choices. Drifting unprepared into the consequences of lack of proper thought.

In the first reading today (Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25) we have a choice with golden hues though. It is an invitation to a costly choice, but the sort of choice which offers and promises everything. The cost is to put aside the things which distract and destroy relationships, the sort of things which undermine commitments.

The people of Israel entering into the promised land needed to be wholehearted in their choice to serve God. No bet hedging. No insurance policy of options in their back pockets. What God asked of them was wholehearted commitment. It wasn't at all God being a control freak.

Not at all. It was because the path towards life which would actually be fulfilling meant deep listening, the sort of deep listening in which we are prepared to be formed and transformed.

Where the values and perspective of God, justice, mercy, compassion, generosity, seep so deeply into our hearts that they become who we are, not just what we remember sometimes to do.

When Jesus makes the same invitation to wholehearted commitment he is not saying something new. He is recalling the call that has been there for the people of God throughout the whole story as it unfolds in the pages of the Bible. But the call needs to be made and remade and presented again and again because rather than choosing gold the response God gets so often is broken down into a part choice, a sliver of a glimpse of the whole of the choice, a tiny daub of colour instead of the whole canvas of opportunities.

Choose the gold option, the whole package, the journey and connection which brings out the best of who we are and can be and will be. That is the invitation. Then, live into that.

Today in this parish we are making choices.

We have been asked prayerfully to let the question seep into our hearts “who does God call us to be?” The consequences of that ‘being’ which we now share with each other are choices about our life and future here together.

What we do today is painting a picture, based on previous choices which we have made, each of us and as community, in serving God. Some good choices will inspire other good choices. Some poor choices will inspire fresh and different choices for who we will be from this point onwards. Participating at all in shaping our future is a choice in itself. Choosing to be here and to be fully engaged. Let it be done with passion and hope.

May what we share be rich with colour and deeply inspired. Choose to participate, to share what is in your heart and choose with all your heart to be part of the journey ahead of us from this point on.

Amen

**Paul Mitchell**