

The blessing and the curse of human freedom is that God lets us make our own choices.

Some of the choices we make are small: do you let your spouse see how annoyed you are when he lets you down, again? Do you bite your tongue, or does that cutting remark slip out? Do you tell the little white lie if no one will be the wiser?

Some of the choices we make are not so small. Should you accept the promotion if it means extended trips away from your family? Should you move your ailing mother to a nursing home or shoulder the caregiving burden yourself? Should you use your income tax refund to pay down your credit cards or buy that new jet-ski you've had your eye on? Should you make your teenager go with you to church or just skip it to forgo the argument it always brings?

Sometimes when we have a choice to make, we know in our hearts what we should do; we just need the strength to do it. But other times, our hearts are hard, temptation's whisper too great. Self-gratification is so easy to justify. *I want it. I need it. I deserve it.*

As we face the cross this Good Friday we are reminded that our choices have consequences. In the cross we see every bad decision we've ever made, every time we've turned away from God, every way we've failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. The cross is God's answer to our weakness, our shame, our sin.

The blessing and the curse of human freedom is that God lets us make our own choices. God grieves as he watches us make bad decisions, and fail to live up to our potential, and get caught up in selfish desires. But God does not interfere. It's our life to live, our choices to make. That doesn't mean that God doesn't care about what we choose. Our lives matter to God. It doesn't mean God doesn't try to guide us. He speaks to us in prayer or

through others; we have a whole book filled with examples and instructions of what we should do. But when God created Adam and Eve and the tree in the garden, he gave them the freedom to make their own way. He does the same for us. God honors us with the freedom to choose which masters we will serve, how we will show our faith, even if we believe at all. Yet here's our predicament: because we're human, given the choice between life and death, time and again we choose death. We reject God.

So what hope is there for us? Just this: we have a savior. His name is Jesus. When we seek to fill ourselves with things that destroy he offers the bread of life. When we cannot let go of our sin and shame, he washes us clean. When we go astray he calls us home. When we cannot help ourselves, he is our hope, our only hope.

If we see anything in the cross it is that even though God lets us live with the consequences of our choices, he does not leave us to face them alone. In fact, we say that we have the freedom to choose only because Jesus has already chosen us. He chose the nails, the nails that would drain his blood, so that we might be with God. He chose the cross, the ultimate agony and shame, so that we might know acceptance and peace. He chose love over hate, service over selfishness, forgiveness over scorekeeping, mercy over judgment – he chose this life and this death so that we might choose to follow him. Who else would choose to put the needs of others first, and themselves last? Who else would choose the risk that comes with love? Who else would choose to give their heart away? Who else would choose the cross? Only Jesus.

My friends, many of the choices we make lead us to death. But we can still lay our sins and struggles at his feet. We can give him our heart. Bring yourself – all of yourself, your very best and your very worst – and turn it over to Jesus. Because he has already made his choice. He chooses you.