

**“I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity:
choose life.”**

**Last week Jesus was around the dinner table and reminded both his
inner circle and his prickly adversaries that humility not status,
vulnerability and not comfort,
would be the best ways to really enjoy the banquet,
to enjoy the new life, the full life,
the deep freedom and satisfaction God desires for us.**

**Today, Jesus opens up the discussion to the crowds who are glomming
onto to him on his journey toward Jerusalem.**

**He says what no Hillary or Donald advisor would ever recommend:
Jesus says that the full enjoyment of the real life, the real happiness,
the real deal and the real meal, the banquet of kingdom,
living whole and free and fully alive,
is completely available and at hand:**

but ... it's gonna cost you.

Count on it,

expect it,

plan for it.

It's gonna cost you.

**Not because the odds are against us,
not because God and universe are perverse score-keepers,
waiting to catch us up in a merciless game of “gotcha”,
but simply because if we are going to enjoy a life
of deep happiness and freedom and integrity,**

our values, our choices, our actions really matter.
And the consequence of our choices and actions really matter.
And they usually are not what the culture is asking for,
not what the powers that be, then or now, need and want,
not what even our families are used to hearing about and doing.
Jesus tells us today to grab hold of this new way of feeling and seeing
and responding,
start walking with this cross,
and then follow him.
It's the way to deep freedom and calm
but it's not free.

They might pull out the pepper spray, tear gas, and the water cannons,
they will set the dogs on you,
they will accuse you of not being a patriot,
of being ungrateful,
but you will be free, alive, already feasting at the table of the kingdom.

If the whole world or the entire nation or whole family
is charging toward something that just doesn't feel right,
that's not quite complete, that isn't delivering what it promises,
and you say, "I'm going to sit this one out,"
—it's gonna cost you.

Not because you've suddenly become Mother Teresa
but because, by God's grace, in your own clumsy, awkward, imperfect
way,
in that moment, you simply decide, you choose not to stand for it.
I won't stand for it. I won't laugh at the harmless joke at work,

I won't grab all I can even as others can't even reach the table,
and, even if I am in a place of great privilege and gratitude,
I will sometimes choose to ally myself with those who are not,
who cannot.

Jesus says that the joyful, clear, bright path to the deepest kind of
freedom and integrity and wholeness
is...the way of the cross,
that hard, heavy, costly path of
discerning what we really, really believe in our heart of hearts,
of knowing what has real value,
of sensing what is vital, life-affirming, and life-giving
and grabbing hold of it,
even if the rest of the team, the rest of the crowds,
even if your family and Facebook friends
don't understand or are offended.

Today, while he's in prison, St. Paul meets the escaped slave Onesimus.

Probably the only chance Onesimus has to stay alive is to go back to
Philemon; under Roman law he's a marked man.

Paul sends the letter we heard today:

"Philemon, we both know this isn't the way things are done,
but I'm warning you: When your servant Onesimus returns don't even
think of exercising your legal options.

I'm alongside him and I'm fully allied with him.

Remember, you owe me, Philemon.

In this kingdom to which we *really* belong,
there is only mercy and forgiveness,
and you'd better be alongside him, too."

Paul tells him: "So get my nice guest room ready *pronto*, Philemon.
But know that Onesimus will be taking it—permanently.
He's no longer your slave: he's your brother.
End of discussion."

After the narrow escape from Egypt and that life of slavery and
humiliation and the years of hopeful travel,
Now gathered on the plains of Moab looking across the waters toward
the Promised Land,

Moses tells the Hebrew sons and daughters
sure, they've escaped, but they're not really free yet,
not free unless and until
they choose what is deeply right in every single decision,
what is morally acceptable in every human interaction,
no matter what is going on around them.

And it's really not that strange or hard to figure out:
actually it's not even on those stone tablets or in the pages
of the bible. Remember the part just before today's?

The word is near you...stop and listen.

Your heart will tell you:

"No, that's not quite right."

"No, that's really mean."

"No, we shouldn't be doing this."

"No, that's not going to advance our shared human project."

"Yes, that is the right thing to say, the right thing to do."

"Yes, I can try to do this by God's help."

"Yes, it's going to make waves but it's the only life I have
and right now is the only chance I have to make a small difference."

In Jesus, that word of life comes to us even more closely,
because in Jesus, the Divine will and power and gifts
are fully allied to our human lives and hearts and choices and actions.

By baptism, we are immersed into *his* life and actions
and we are drenched in his life-giving presence and power.
Every action and choice of our lives has life or death consequences
which are felt here and in the hereafter.

What will you give up?

What will you risk?

What will you stand up for and when will you choose to sit it out?

Not sure?

Do the kind thing,

ally yourself with those who are invisible or without a voice,
choose what might be generative and life-giving.

Come into our real life in God while in this world.

Come into freedom and delight.

Friend, come up higher, the banquet awaits.