

Preached by Susan Main Hall
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, Virginia
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Presbyterian Women Sunday

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

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

Every day you make choices ... we all do.

We decide what clothes to wear in the morning. We decide what to eat for breakfast. We decide what to carry with us as we walk out the door. We even decide where to go.

Seriously, we decide everything, everything that put us right here, right now, in the condition that we are in.

God gave us that opportunity to make those choices. Remember, humans were given free will. That means we all live our lives based on the results of our own decisions. Every day, each of us chooses everything about our day.

Think about it:

Monday through Friday, most of us get up, get dressed, and shuffle off to work—some of us to jobs we say we hate, working hours we moan we can't stand, performing (or in some cases, dodging) tasks that we argue that no one should have to do, especially for people who don't deserve the results of our hard work.

Others of us go to school, taking classes that we dread because we have been told we *have* to take them. Then, we watch the minutes slowly, painfully tick by on the clock, enduring what we consider awful lectures from boring teachers.

Still others of us work around the home, grumbling at the drudgery of the same, repetitious tasks that are required to make a home for a family.

Think about it.
Isn't that how life just is?

You know what? ==> It doesn't have to be. Those attitudes are your choice.

Be honest with yourself ... It is *your* choices that got you that job, that put you in that class room, and that has you as a homemaker.

And ...
It's, also, your choice on how you face everything in every day.

Sometimes we choose to take a job because we decide we need the money, not because we believe that it is our dream career. And sometimes we enroll in a class because it is required to complete the diploma or degree that we have chosen, not because that particular class is our favorite topic. And sometimes we choose to be the caring foundation at home, in order to help our families function better, instead of pursuing more glamorous activities than laundry and food shopping.

Some choices we make in life we make out of fear, some out of pride, and some out of laziness. The results of these choices are the same results we would get if we had chosen those options through conscious, well-considered, caring decisions. A decision is a decision regardless of whether we choose our actions for the day or just let it happen. Our decisions, our choices, sum up who we are and our lives, in general.

Permit me to tell you about a life I got to see at nearing the end of its worldly impact.

I went to a funeral just a few days before Christmas. It was a grey, cold day in Wisconsin with more snow predicted to be arriving soon. There were long lines of cars narrowing the newly plowed cemetery road. The cemetery personnel had laid yards of dark green carpet over the snow so attendees in dress shoes could more easily get to the rows and rows of chairs that had been set up. The funeral home had arranged for several of the flower arrangements to be artistically spread across the beautiful white grounds surrounding the large mausoleum. People spilled out of cars, dressed in their absolute best finery, all in shades of black. There were people hugging people and family being comforted by friends. You could feel the warmth, the love, and the blessings of all the lives this person had touched. Obviously, this person had made some good choices in life.

As we drove by, I turned away, to look to the gravesite to which we were headed. The two cars came to a halt in front of an aged monument surrounded by mud where grounds keepers had cleared away the snow so we could see the names from generations past. At this gravesite, there would be no service, no friends, and only one person to cry. No, I was not alone, but the person being laid to rest was alone, and had been alone for years, at her own choice.

You see, she chose to shun her children and grandchildren, to alienate her friends, and to decide that certain people in her world were not worthy of her attention or respect. So, in the silence of that cold winter solstice, while the few family members in attendance groped from something nice to say about her, I watched two deer quietly approach and offer the blessing of their presence.

I like to think that was God offering the deceased, a blessing of peace and forgiveness for choices poorly made. That's the cool thing about God; you are forgiven by His grace.

However, you don't have to wait until you die to get a clean start. If you ask for forgiveness for past errors, you are forgiven, at that very moment. From there, we can all start making valuable, conscious choices right now.

Past thoughtless choices that didn't follow God's guidance or choices that even hurt others can't be un-made. The wounds are still there, and other previously made commitments and promises should be fulfilled, but we *can* each strive to make all our future choices better, more caring, more productive, more positive.

I have observed that 10% of life is fabulous, and 10% of life is pretty horrible, but the remaining 80% is what you choose to make it. That means that as much as 90% of your life can be pretty good, if you choose. No, it's not always easy to choose the good, but it is a choice that can be made. We cannot control the actions of others, but we can choose our reaction to those circumstances, and we can choose our own actions.

The Bible offers great guidance for how to treat others. Beyond the Ten Commandments, the Bible tells how to love one another and how to settle disputes. The Bible even acknowledges our ability to know right from wrong and the amazing blessing of choice.

So, what choices are you making every day that you could make consciously and thus, make better?

- How about realizing that you chose your destination and your actions every day?
- How about choosing to follow God?
- How about deciding to be God's hands and to be God's blessing? — reaching out to help others, instead of ambling through life only partially aware of the world around you?

How about something as simple as choosing to start every day happy, instead of glum, grumpy or angry?

The Bible, in Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 19, asks you to "choose life," so, be conscious in the life YOU CHOOSE.

Amen.