

THE WORD IS NEAR – CHOOSE LIFE!

Haslett Community UCC – July 11, 2010 – Carol Ingells

“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.” Ps. 25: 4-5

How seldom it seems we focus our attention on our Jewish heritage. Christians easily and frequently forget that our religion is based on Judaism, that Jesus, the Christ, was a Jew, that much of the Christian scripture is based on the Hebrew Scriptures. Over and over in the New Testament you will read: “It is said” or “Scripture says”. That always refers to the Hebrew Scriptures or what we refer to as the Old Testament. Christianity claims to be the **fulfillment** of Jewish scripture.

Today’s reading from Deuteronomy is one of those significant passages which can illuminate us over and over again. While life now is nothing like life was then, the basic lessons are there in every time and place. The Hebrew people have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, whining and grumbling about pretty much everything, nearly driving poor Moses stark raving mad. To go back a few centuries, you may remember that Jacob and his sons came to Egypt, pleading for food, having been driven from their land by famine. And that Joseph, the man who had been sold into slavery by these same brothers, was the one with the authority to receive and assist them, which he most graciously did. Oh, let’s keep going backward a little further. Jacob was that ornery son of Isaac, who was the son of old Sarah and Abraham. We’ll hear next week how Sarah laughed when his birth was foretold. So we trace the family history from Abraham and Sarah, through Isaac and Rebecca, through Jacob, Leah and Rachel, through Joseph, Rachel’s son, through the eventual descent of the Hebrews into becoming Pharaoh’s slaves, through the rescue of baby Moses in the bull rushes by Pharaoh’s daughter, through Moses’ experience of the burning bush and God’s call to leadership, of his most reluctant consent, through their “pass over” escape from Egypt, 40 years of wandering around, and now they are about to return to the “Promised Land” and Moses is preaching his last sermon. After this, he will go up into the mountains and die. He is giving them their instructions, straight from God.

I want to focus on two parts of those instructions: “Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away...No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

Too frequently we go looking somewhere else or to someone else for Truth, for Meaning, for Love, when all the time what we’re searching for is right here, within us. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, it was right here all the time. I know people who seem to be forever **discovering** the latest diet, the latest therapy, the latest spiritual program—ah, here it IS, at last. Soon whatever it was has not proven sufficient and they go on to some other “certain” thing.

God says, through Moses, that the word--that is, the truth of life--is in your own heart. You KNOW what it is, if you take time to listen to your self. Your body, your mind, your spirit, infused as it is with God, can guide you as well or better than anything outside of yourself. Of course others make tons of money convincing us that we “need” what they have to sell, including spirituality. Maybe just one more book or CD or online course will give me what I need! God call us to remain confident in ourselves, to trust in what God is saying to us as we worship and study and pray and listen—God is communicating with us all the time.

Later Moses says, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in God’s ways, and observing God’s commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.” But if you don’t, it goes on, if you worship other gods, you and your children shall perish. That’s pretty stark, isn’t it? Other gods. Well, we don’t do that, right? Of course there **is** money, power, fame, athletic contests, having stuff, endless exploitation of the planet and her creatures. Yes, I guess we do worship other gods. I wonder if we and our children will perish.

What does it mean to “choose life” and how do we do that? Here are a couple of ideas. We **choose life** when we keep putting one foot in front of the other even though the way ahead is unclear. We **choose life** when we care more for others than for our own selfish, ego-centered desires. We **choose life** when

we focus more on gratitude than on greed. We **choose life** when the pain we feel seems life-giving rather than death-dealing. Example. The pain of letting a child go off on his or her own is life-giving; the pain of grasping tightly to that child, suffocating the child with protection, worrying about every movement, can be death-dealing—at least to that relationship. We must choose, we do choose, a million times a day. Someone said the saddest thing is to come to the end of life and realize we haven't really lived at all.

But **how** do we choose life? It sounds easy. We choose life by doing just what the Scripture says—love God, obey God, trust God, ask God, listen for God's response, desire what you believe God desires for you. Another way to say that is, notice God noticing you. Have the confidence to step out in faith knowing you are not alone, that the very Source of all that is, is in you and working through you.

As they say in "Fiddler on the Roof", "*le chiem*,"—"to Life!" May. We. Choose. Life.