**Church Sermon – 21 July-19**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord and Redeemer. Amen**

Choices, choices, choices! How do we decide the right choices? We hear our parents say: “Well you made your choice!” Live with it! Is that really fair? We start making choices from a young age. Choices about school subjects, which ones we like or easiest! We make choices about friends and career for a quick buck, job security or to have time after work to hang out with friends. We make many choices in the words of a 60 year old blogger - good ones and bad ones.

**Martha and Mary**

These choices were no different between Martha and Mary in the presence of Jesus and his disciples at their home in Bethany after the restoring of Lazarus’ life. I can imagine the thoughts of Martha and Mary:

* **Mary** - I am not good at all this hospitality work like Martha. I’ve tried in the past and, as the younger sister, I am not cut out for this. Maybe, I still owe a lot to Jesus because of what he did for me and my brother. So, I will choose to sit with him and use my expensive perfume on His feet. Maybe, He’ll appreciate that!
* **Martha** - Do I tend to the hospitality of Jesus and the disciples? I cannot rely on Mary! Is there enough water to cleanse their hands, do I have enough towels to wipe their feet? Oh and what about the food? Is it hot enough? Have I got enough bread and spices for the stew? Maybe, this will impress Jesus and His disciples. Where’s Mary? Oh, I’ll tell Jesus. He’ll understand as he always has good insight!

So, Martha complained to Jesus about the unfairness of her sister, Mary, sitting at His feet whilst she does all the work.

Jesus responded: *“My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details. There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it (or made the right choice) and it will not be taken away!”*

**Amos**

Another community who had choices were the Jewish community during the time of the Prophet Amos. They made the choice not to put God first in their festival celebrations. This community enjoyed peace and prosperity but were complacent in their money making schemes, oppressed the poor, even selling them into slavery.

Through Amos, God expressed anger at the exploitative merchants - after a quick buck through cheating, over charging and selling substitutes for the real thing. Judges exploited the poor too and stole the wealth of the poor through taxes and unfair rent. God knew the extent of the corporate sins and exploiting of the poor whilst disregarding the prophetic words of Amos.

God pronounced judgement upon Israel, the northern Kingdom, for their complacency, idolatry and oppression to the poor. And declared that these guys would never benefit from these immoral earnings. Consequently, Israel were conquered by the Assyrians (now northern Iraq and south eastern Turkey), taken as captives and made slaves.

**Observations**

Mary and Martha both loved Jesus. After all, He restored the life of their favourite brother, Lazarus. But Martha thought Mary’s hospitality of guests was inferior to hers. She didn’t realize that in her desire to serve, she was neglecting her guests.

For the Jewish community in the times of Prophet Amos, it was all about the money. They kept their religious festivals but not in spirit. They couldn’t wait until the festivals were over in order to return to their money making schemes. It was all about them, not others, even if that meant cheating.

**Wider lessons of relevance today:**

This raises the following questions:

* Are we so busy doing things for Jesus like Martha that we’re not spending any time with Him like Mary?
* Have we let our service in the church become self-serving that we miss the point of why we are here? Jesus did not blame Martha for being concerned about household chores. He was only asking her to set her priorities! Is there a lesson for us?
* Service to Christ can fall into busy work that we miss the point that first, we are here to worship!

And what about Amos!

* Do we take a day of rest to worship at least once a week? Well, we are all here, so the answer is most likely to be yes. Or is making money more important for us? Notwithstanding, I do understand the pressures of fundraising because of the need to replace the roof and maintain the church building heritage!
* But when we give time to God, is our heart in our worship?
* Do we look for answers for life’s problems elsewhere, not in the bible or through prayer? Is there a sense of urgency sharing the word of God, our testimony, our experiences? If we are not doing so, there will come a time when those who need to hear the good news cannot find it!

**The Love of Christ, a personal choice..**

The Apostle Paul says that it is the LOVE of Christ that controls us, the cause of all of his achievements and successes in ministry. That was his secret in his ministry. The love of Christ controls us, literally. ***It narrows us to the Way of the Lord.***

***We are transformed in the name of Christ, the Way of the Lord!***

When we begin with ***the Way of the Lord*,** everything, everything falls into place. The priorities, patience, absence of anxieties, certainties versus uncertainties, the context of fundraising. What it means to be inwardly and outwardly focused! But if we begin with something else, life turns out to be a mess. **“They made me keep of many vineyards, but my own vineyard did I not keep!”**

If we begin with self-control, then we become the centre and get caught up in the business of controlling ourselves. This will exhaust us quickly because we are **outside of the Way of the Lord and we become extremely anxious and wonder if we will slip out from beneath our control**.

If we begin, as Apostle Paul did, **with Christ**, then **the spring of all our actions and priorities** **is love** for Him, and we become released from own pre-occupation to pre-occupation with Him. When we begin with love for Jesus Christ, we end up with self-control. But when we begin with ***our own self-control***, we end up with a self that is anxious, fearful and full of problems.

A man said: “I tried the Christian Life from the angle of self-control”. “Every morning I would start the day by saying: “Today I will live like a Christian”. However, every night he went to sleep knowing that he was a failure! You see, **how can an uncontrolled will control an uncontrolled self?**

**The Way of the Lord** reminds us, as in today’s New Testament reading that, **Christ is the visible image of the invisible God**. He made the things we can see and the things we cannot see. He holds all creation together and we don’t need to experience the unfairness of life!

We are blessed with the peace of God because through Him, God reconciled us to **Christ (He broke our chains).** He made peace in heaven and on earth through His death on the cross. We are blessed with the peace of God which the beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel affirms***: “God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God!”***

**The Way of the Lord makes us holy and blameless,** we don’t need to feel inadequate as Mary did, or frustrated like Martha, because she was doing all the work yet Mary got the credit! There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus!

**The Way of the Lord changes our perspectives.** Did I know that I am standing on Holy Ground? Here, in this church? That this is really the holy sacred space of God? That everything looks different! His Spirit is really with us! I can sense the presence of God here! I can see how crooked my life was compared to the straight stick life of Jesus! There is still space to experience what Moses did before the Burning Bush, ***make a choice*** and then say, as quoted from the Jewish Bible, third chapter of Exodus**: “I’m already here, and I am willing to do whatever it is you wish, before you even ask”. What confidence! That’s what happens when we have a personal encounter with God!**

**So a thought to leave with you, today: “When was the last time you made a choice for the first time”! The last time I made a choice and did something for the *first time* was today! So, I have my badge of Christ’s honour! How about yours! Will you pray more? Will you read more of the bible? *In fact, God speaks to those more, who read His words the most!***

**I hope and pray that the next time we meet, you can share with me your personal experiences encountering Christ and the good news..**

**Amen**