

**By THE Mouth of God**  
**Sermon, October 25, 2020**  
**Reformation Sunday and Christian Education Sunday**  
**Text: Deuteronomy 30:11-20; 34:1-6**

The book of Deuteronomy was basically Moses' farewell address to the people he cared about and loved, people he had been on the desert road with for some forty years. They were now about to leave the wilderness and pass on into the Promised Land, but Moses would not be going with them. The entire first thirty-three chapters are his final words to them ... words he no doubt chose quite carefully, reviewing all that was important to remember regarding their four-decade saga. Deuteronomy is the fifth of the Books of Moses, the five books known as the Pentateuch or the Torah (*in fact, in German Bibles Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are called First Moses, Second Moses, Third Moses and so on.*) We can assume, though, that he may not have written the entire last chapter, which is the account of his death; it may have been written by Joshua. We pick up what is something of a theme summary verse of this thirty-three chapter sermon in chapter 30. "*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*"

Moses never enters the Promised Land towards which he had been leading these people these long years, he will only get a glimpse in the distance of it. The Bible does give us some answers as to why Moses was not allowed to enter the land, but that's really another sermon ... actually, that's probably better suited for an entire Bible study hour; I tried preaching on that back in 1998, and as I looked back on that 'way too long sermon of long ago (*while preparing for this sermon*) I regrettably realized I probably risked boring you all nearly to death. Suffice it to say for now, we do know the God Who denied Moses' entry into the Promised Land, and Who brought Moses to his death here in Moab, this God did not abandon His faithful servant in his death. Deuteronomy 34:6 tells us God **buried** Moses. Now, we don't know what that means, but the previous verse gives a hint ... it tells us Moses died "*... according to the Word of the Lord.*" Other translations render this "*... as the Lord had said.*" Literally, the Hebrew text says Moses died "*... at the mouth of the LORD.*" Moses died "at the mouth of God." Puritan commentator Matthew Henry asserts that in the context of ancient Jewish tradition and culture this phrase might best be translated, "*He died with a kiss from the mouth of God*" ... the connotation being a tender, touching and deeply moving passing from one world to the next.<sup>1</sup> At the end, God leans down from heaven and ends Moses' life with a soft, gentle kiss; thus, Moses died "*at the mouth of God.*" The tender, loving, life-giving mouth of God, the very same lips with which He breathed life into the very first human soul in Adam as recorded in the First Book of Moses (*which we call Genesis*). This imagery also calls to mind Moses' words earlier in Deuteronomy 8, words that are quoted millennia later by Jesus Himself in His time of temptation in the wilderness: "*Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes by the mouth of God.*"

During the presentation of the Bibles to our third graders earlier this morning, I cited (*as I do each year at this time*) II Timothy 3:16-17: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" The words of Scripture are breathed from the mouth of God, the same God-breathed breath that gave life to humanity in Creation, and the same mouth of the Lord that tenderly kissed His servant Moses, the Law Giver, at the point of his earthly departure. I find it fascinating that the five Books of Moses basically begin with this imagery of all Creation being called into existence by the life giving Mouth of God, and the same Mouth breathing life into the first human, and the five books end with this tender scene of the same powerful, loving mouth of God tenderly kissing His faithful servant ... and, in effect, breathing into him the breath of *eternal* life. The five books of Moses also begins with a crucial choice and ends with a crucial choice ... the choice in the Garden made by Adam and Eve, and the choice offered here by Moses in the selection read in Chapter 30. He basically sums it all up by saying, "*And now, life or death. Just like in Eden. You pick.*" In short, make the right choices and you and your children will live and live well. Make the wrong choices; destruction, difficulty, death will result.

It may be a bit of a stretch, but thirty-six years (*and four days; the anniversary was last Wednesday!*) of ordained ministry experience has taught me that just about *everything* in ministry can be summed up in Moses admonition and imperative to **make right choices**. God is not some God sitting high and aloof on His throne, watching us in the struggles simply bellowing to us from on high, "*STOP THAT! Stop, stop, stop; no, no, no!*" I think if we are honest with ourselves, in our heart of hearts, we really know what it is God wants us to do and not do ... we know what it is we must personally do to make things right, we know what it is we must personally do to live lives of integrity, we know what it is we must personally do to live godly and God-honoring lives of honor and integrity. We must choose. In today's text, Moses says in so many words. "*What I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It's not hard to understand! It's not way up there in heaven that someone has to fly up there to get it for you, nor is it overseas that some expert has to come from thousands of miles away to make it accessible to you ... the word is very near you; what has come from God's mouth is now by His grace in your mouth and in your heart so you may readily obey it and do it. Don't keep asking God what you are*

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting related article, see <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-divine-kiss>

*supposed to do or not do; I'm sure He's told you already! Don't keep avoiding your calling, don't keep putting off your responsibilities, don't keep making excuses for things you've done or left undone, don't keep putting off doing what you know to be right by claiming you don't know what the will of God is for your life! Love the Lord your God, walk in His ways, keep His commands, then you will live and increase and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering. I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Your choice!"*

To paraphrase Don Corleone, this is a choice we really can't refuse. Moses goes on to conclude, "Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." For better or worse, God allows us to make choices, our own decisions. When He created us in His image, *the ability to choose* was part of that. The ability to choose is part and parcel of what it means to be made in the image of God; part and parcel of what it means to be a human being. When God created us, He chose NOT to make us mechanisms wholly obedient to His control, like so many video characters controlled by His divine joy stick in an X-Box world. Nor did He choose to make us just one more animal controlled and driven solely by passion and appetite. No, He endowed us with the awesome gift ... and the great burden ... of being free and responsible. In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed to live a full and fulfilling life, which *included* the opportunity and dignity to make very real choices ... that was what that forbidden tree symbolized. Choice. Adam and Eve were given the choice to heed God's instructions and live forever in Paradise, to choose life; or, they could choose to eat of the forbidden tree and go on to die. And we know the story. As the Grail guardian told *Indiana Jones*, they chose ... poorly. And we have suffered ever since.

I think few words have been more politicized and propagandized than the word "choice." Choice *can* be wholesome and desirable; choice can also be mischievous and destructive ... it all depends on what is chosen. Interestingly, the Greek word for choice is "haeresis;" we get our word *heresy* from it; the essence of heresy is wrong choice. We can (*and often do*) commit "heresy," we choose poorly. However, God's will for us is that we make choices which lead to *life*, and that's why He says to us through Moses, "I have set before you life and death ... therefore choose life, that you and your children may live!" There are destructive choices and there are constructive choices. There are choices that will make us and those who love us stronger and better, and there are choices that will wreak havoc in our lives and theirs. God desires each of us to make choices that lead to full, satisfying and abundant life, choices that are in accord with the life-giving, loving word that comes out of His Mouth, the same loving, tender yet powerfully life-giving Mouth with which He tenderly welcomes His servant Moses into the eternal Promised Land.

I end with this: There is one whom the Bible calls the fullest expression of the Word of the Lord by the mouth of God, and the One Word of God Who became flesh and dwelt among us. The one choice that supersedes all others, a choice I believe most, if not all, of us here have made ... is to choose not only life, but to honor and serve the One who calls Himself the Life ... and the Way, and the Truth ... the fullest expression of the mouth of God.

*And now we call our Christian Education volunteers to come forward and be commissioned to teach ... by the mouth of God.*

## **COMMISSIONING OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TEACHERS**

*(Adapted from The Worshipbook, "Order for the Public Worship of God," pp. 100-101)*

"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (*Deuteronomy 6:4-7*) "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age." (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

*The congregation shall respond (from Psalm 78:3-7)* "WHAT WE HAVE HEARD AND KNOWN FOR OURSELVES AND WHAT OUR ANCESTORS HAVE TOLD US MUST NOT BE WITHHELD FROM THEIR DESCENDANTS, BUT BE HANDED ON BY US TO THE NEXT GENERATION; THESE IN THEIR TURN WILL TELL THEIR OWN CHILDREN SO THAT THEY, TOO, MAY PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE IN GOD, REMEMBER THE WORKS OF GOD, AND KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD." *The Pastor will then address the teachers, saying:*

"You have been called by our Lord Jesus Christ to a special work and ministry. As teachers of the Word of Truth, you will announce God's good law to each new generation, and tell of Jesus Christ, so others may know Him, love Him, and live His truth in the world. Do you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, and through Him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" (*"We do."*) Will you study the Scriptures and the confessions of the church, so that with intelligence, imagination and love you may call men and women, boys and girls to faith in Jesus Christ and train them as His disciples?" (*"We will."*)

*The congregation shall stand, and the Pastor will address them, saying:* "Our Lord ordered His church to teach those who are baptized. Do you, the people of the church, promise to prayerfully support and encourage these men and women as they teach the good news of the Gospel, helping their students know all that Christ commands? If so, please answer, 'We do.'"

*All shall join in this Affirmation of Faith taken from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38: "What does God require in the fourth commandment?"*

FIRST, THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BE MAINTAINED, AND THAT I DILIGENTLY ATTEND CHURCH, ESPECIALLY ON THE LORD'S DAY, TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HOLY SACRAMENTS, TO CALL PUBLICLY UPON THE LORD, AND TO GIVE CHRISTIAN SERVICE TO THOSE IN NEED. SECOND, THAT I CEASE FROM MY EVIL WORKS ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, ALLOW THE LORD TO WORK IN ME THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, AND THUS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE THE ETERNAL SABBATH.

*The Pastor will address the teachers, saying:* 'By the authority of the session of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian, you are now commissioned to teach in the church. Be energetic, be diligent, be honorable, and most of all, be faithful to Christ our Lord and His church as you carry out the work of this ministry!' *The congregation shall pray in unison for the teachers, saying:*

"ALMIGHTY GOD: IN EVERY AGE YOU HAVE APPOINTED TEACHERS TO TELL OF YOUR POWER, GOODNESS AND LOVE. WE THANK YOU FOR THESE WHO WILL TEACH OTHERS YOUR WAYS. BY THE POWER OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, GRANT UNTO THEM SPECIAL GIFTS TO DO THEIR SPECIAL WORK. MAY THEY BE FAITHFUL VESSELS OF YOUR SON OUR LORD, MAY THEY SPEAK HIS TRUTH TO THOSE ENTRUSTED TO THEIR CARE, AND MAY THEY BE EMPOWERED AND EQUIPPED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF FAITH, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY, 'OUR FATHER ...'"