

“Wisdom: Making Good Choices”

Date: May 31, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Graduates recognized

Theme: wisdom, choices

Texts: Proverbs 3:1-8; Deuteronomy 30:15-20

So, the joke is told of a man who was flying cross-country. The flight attendant asked him, “Would like a dinner?” The man answered, “What are my choices?” The flight attendant said, “Yes or no!”

That’s what Moses is saying here. You have a choice to make. Do you say “yes or no” to God? And then he pleads with them, “Please say yes! Choose life with God! Because God loves you, choose life with God.”

On this day that we honor our graduates, we want to turn our attention to wisdom – making good choices. I chose as our first lesson a reading from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs was written by Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived.

In the first chapter of his book he tells the reason for writing it. “The purpose of these proverbs is to teach people wisdom and discipline and to help them understand wise sayings” (1:2 NLT). In this book of the Bible, Solomon shares his wisdom on such varied topics as money, marriage, family life, friends, laziness, relationships, temptation and leadership.

Proverbs is a book of wise sayings, providing answers to our questions about everyday life. Through the repetition of wise thought, people are guided to become wiser. Let me say it again: Through the repetition of wise thought, people are guided to become wiser.

Wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge. There are a lot of people who know a lot of things, but they may not have any common

sense. They aren't necessarily wise, just because they have a lot of book knowledge. Wisdom comes through making good, sound choices, and learning from our bad choices.

There is an old Chinese proverb that summarizes this nicely: "Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words. Be careful of your words, because your words become your actions. Be careful of your actions, because your actions become your habits. Be careful of your habits, for your habits become your character. Be careful of your character, for your character becomes your destiny."

We all make choices, every day. We have to choose what we're going to eat, when we're going to bed, how we will spend our time. We also have to choose what to believe. Do I believe in God? Do I want to go to church? Is there anything in life worth dying for?

Some choices are small and don't matter a whole lot, but other choices are a matter of life and death. Some choices are easier to make than others. Sometimes, not to make a choice is, in a way, choosing. And there are consequences for the choices we make, both good and bad.

Wisdom is learning how to choose wisely. If you sow a good life – a life of integrity, of kindness, of paying attention to your relationship with God and others, of taking care of your body, mind and soul, then you will reap a good life of lasting relationships, better than average health, and a feeling of great satisfaction.

Try to take shortcuts, be a cheater, simply use people for your own gain, and life has a way of finding you out. The choice is ours. I hope I don't sound too preachy. Forget that I'm a pastor. Any good psychologist, doctor or successful business leader will tell you the

same thing. Making good choices leads to a better life. Wisdom is learning how to make good choices.

God's will is that we make good choices, choices that will lead to life. Toward the end of the book of Deuteronomy, one of the final words God speaks through Moses is this sentence: "I call Heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. *Choose* life so that you and your descendants may live." (Deut. 30:19)

Let me set the stage. Moses was delivering to the children of Israel the covenant he had received from God. There was no danger that he could overstate his case. He had no choice but to deliver a hard message.

The stakes were extremely high. The very survival of his people was at stake. "I set before you a choice: life or death." Moses was saying that a time of decision was at hand. The people of Israel would have to decide, were they going to be a people of God, or not? If so, choose the way that leads to life.

My friends, there are many roads that do not lead to life. And they all begin with a thought. "Maybe I'll try it just this once." "Everybody else is doing it; maybe I can do it too." "This way seems easier; the other ways seems too hard." "If it feels so good, how can it be wrong?"

Yes, there are times when we actually talk ourselves into making wrong decisions. And maybe nothing happens the first time; maybe we don't get caught, maybe nothing terrible happens. But remember the Chinese quote? "Be careful of your words, they

become actions, which become habits, which eventually become our character and our destiny.”

No one is born into the world wishing to grow up to be an addict, or an alcoholic, or a homeless person, or a criminal. But one bad decision, followed by another can lead to a life that ends in prison, or the hospital or the morgue.

Today we celebrate the accomplishment of these persons graduating from high school and schools of higher learning. We rejoice that they have taken many positive steps in their life. We pray for them the wisdom to continue to make good choices.

As your pastor, I would not presume to make your choices for you. I respect you too much to do that. But not only as your pastor, but also your friend, I would remind you, and all of us, that there are destructive choices and there are constructive choices.

There are choices that will make you and those who love you stronger. And then there are choices that will wreck your life and theirs. All of life hinges on the choices you and I make.

So, remember the words of Jesus when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” May each one of us choose the path that leads to eternal life. Amen? Amen!