

January 31, 2016    “Choices” Pt. 1    Luke 10:25-29

The Jericho road was a dangerous place. It was a place where bands of robbers regularly looked for careless travellers. Clint Eastwood made a film back in 1985, a western entitled Pale Rider.

Among other things it is about a small struggling mining community, a fellowship if you will of independent miners, panning for gold. They are beset by a large mining company owned by one man. His hired thugs eventually kill one of the miners, and Eastwood's character, who appears to be an itinerant preacher comments that the dead miner was a brave man, who made one mistake. He went to town alone. “Man alone is easy prey.” So it was with the man who journeyed down the Jericho road from Jerusalem. He went alone. And he was assaulted and robbed. Easy prey in that desolate, spot filled with places for those who have crime in mind to hide and wait in ambush.

But this morning I want to draw to your attention the story behind the story, the story before the story of that ensuing ambush, and the heroic deeds of a man from Samaria...an unusual candidate for the role of hero. The story before the story is about an engagement between a teacher of the law, and Jesus. I say engagement...that's a military term is it not. In fact Luke makes plain that it involved a contest. The weapons were words. The first shot was fired by the teacher of the law and he was attempting to trap, one could use the word ambush, Jesus.

“An expert in the Law, stood up to test Jesus.” The KJV says “a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Jesus saying, Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life.” A lawyer is a person with expertise where the Law is concerned. And Luke is telling us his

motivation was less than honorable. He was attempting something other than seeking the answer to the question he was posing. In other words he was endeavouring to ambush Jesus. To catch Him up based on the words He would use. The teacher of the Law is there to bring Jesus down, to do Him in, to do Him harm.

The Law in which this teacher had expertise was not law of Rome. It was not what we call a civil code, it is the Law of God. In the Bible that term refers specifically to the first 5 books of the Old Testament...Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Law. Books that contain the revelation of God as to where we came from, and how we are to live. Books which make it plain that when we ignore what God has revealed, or make a different way for ourselves things go wrong, we find ourselves not only in need of God but of His ability to miraculously deliver us. There is a reason the story of the Exodus is followed by the gift of 10 commandments. God's attempt to make it simple for us to stay out of trouble, to avoid disasters, so that we will not be ambushed in the midst of life.

This teacher of the Law stood up and posed his question. He has been listening to Jesus. He has been paying close attention. It has become apparent that Jesus makes claims about Himself that disturb the community of religious leaders in Jerusalem at the time of the Roman occupation of Judea. He has taught the disciples privately, and He has taught to some extent publicly, that He and His Heavenly Father are one. That to know Him is to know the Father. In fact Jesus has gone so far as to say no one can know the Father (God) except the Son of God (Himself) and those to whom He (that is Jesus) chooses to reveal God who is His Father.

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This teacher of the Law asked his question not because he wanted to hear what Jesus would answer, but because he was fairly certain, Jesus would say something that could be used against Him by the Rabinical Council in Jerusalem called the Sanhedrin. Choices have been made. And the principal choice is that Jesus should be eliminated. His enemies are cagey and careful. They bide their time. They try to be smart about this...to move some pieces around the chessboard and wait for the pot to boil over. They know if they can get Jesus in trouble with the Romans, the Romans will come down on Him with a sledge hammer.

Here is something we often overlook and forget. Crucifixion in Judea of criminals, by the Romans was an every day occurrence. Jesus grew up seeing the bodies of the dead on crosses as He walked the roads of His native Galilee area, and anytime He went near Jerusalem. And it is not just what he saw. It is what he smelled. The crucified were left on those crosses to rot in the sun. As a boy Mary would have covered his eyes so that he could not see them. She might have covered his ears so that he could not hear the cries of those who were dying. But there was always the smell reminding Him and every one else who was Jewish...this is something you should avoid at all costs.

We need to remember that. While Jesus friends are making choices...to follow Him...to continue to follow Him...while his enemies are trying to tempt Him and test Him, in a way that is forbidden in the Law...you do not test the Lord your God!! While everyone else is making choices about Jesus, Jesus is making a choice to do one thing to redeem His people. He chooses the way of the cross. The story of this merciful Samaritan is told by Jesus in this very context. Choices, choices, choices. The teacher of the Law

has chosen to try and get Jesus. And Jesus has chosen to walk into the jaws of the ambush. Jesus has chosen to serve His Heavenly Father, as the first thing, the middle thing, and the final thing.

The question is perfect. The teacher of the Law wants Jesus to answer it. You can almost hear the heads turning like at a tennis match. The teacher of the Law has done his best to serve up an ace. The ball is in Jesus court. What will he say. Everyone's eye is on Jesus. Every ear is tuned to hear His voice. Here is the first surprise in this contest of wills, the one who is executing the ambush suddenly finds himself having to answer the question. Because Jesus knows something about this teacher of the Law. Jesus knows the learned rabbi can quote much of those first 5 books of Scripture. He is an expert after all. To the expert in the Law, Jesus asks a question about the Law. "What is written in it? Tell me, what the Law says about inheriting eternal life?"

You can almost hear the learned rabbi smiling. "The Law," Jesus asks, "How do you read it?" Jesus is looking for a quote. The Teacher of the Law makes a choice. He will play this game. If Jesus disagrees...He will be exposed as being less knowledgeable, He might even say something heretical! And if he agrees with the rabbi, it will be a mark on the wall for the teacher of the Law. The scholar quotes from Dueteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind (that's from Deuteronomy 6) and love your neighbour as yourself, (Leviticus 19).

It is a good answer. In one stroke the teacher of the law has defined what the Scripture tells us to do in terms of what to believe, and also how to live faithfully. You can almost hear the confidence

of the one who is about to trap Jesus. Except...he really does not understand who he has decided to ambush. Jesus gives full marks for the answer. He is suddenly the professor and this highly qualified rabbi is suddenly the student. "You have answered correctly," says Jesus. "Do these two things," says Jesus, "and you will live." And if anyone gets a mark on the wall it is Jesus. Who knows exactly what this game is about. It is about faithfulness. And the learned expert in the Scriptures is not trying to be faithful, he is trying to ambush. Jesus on the other hand is committed to loving His Father and doing His Father's will.

Choices. The teacher of the Law is not willing to let it go. Remember his question? What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now, Luke tells us something more. The teacher of the Law, "he wanted to justify himself." He wanted to save himself, he wanted to prove he was a good person, and not a sinner like these disciples or even Jesus. He wanted to prove to the crowd and himself he was a righteous man, who could do no wrong. He is trying to ambush Jesus. To get Him crucified. So he asks Jesus a leading question, a philosophical question. In fact he is trying to lead Jesus out onto a fragile limb, in hopes that it will break. "And who is my neighbour?"

You see the teacher of the Law, the Bible scholar was convinced of several things. He knew the Romans were not his neighbours. They are sinful Gentiles. Foreigners from away. The teacher of the Law is a son of Israel. He is certain that he is righteous, unlike these uncouth fishermen and tax collectors with whom Jesus associates. And frankly this teacher of the Law does not approve of, or like Jesus. He has made choices, this teacher of the Law. Who is my neighbour? He has quoted the Law of God and pretends he does not know who his neighbour is.

We too have choices to make. Some of the choices we have to make are hard. This is certain...we will be on dangerous ground if we set the Scriptures which we know, aside when we make ours. Choose this day whom you will serve, said Joshua, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Serve God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not on my terms, not on the world's terms, not even on terms set by the church, but on God's terms and according to His word. Choose. To refuse to choose is to have made a choice. Choose this day whom you will serve.

Let us pray;

Lord when we understand, we recognize that you have chosen us, chosen us in Christ and Him crucified and risen the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. We choose to follow you under conviction, conviction of our sinfulness and your holyness, the truth that we stumble and fall, while your ways are straight and true and for all time. Be with us we ask, not because we are good, but because you specialize in redeeming us in the midst of our lostness. Give to your church eyes to see with and ears with which to hear your voice in this particular season of time. Let us glorify your name. Amen