

Choices
[written in oral form]

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Luke 23:33-43
Last Sunday of Year C

November 24, 2019
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I am not fond of those automatic answering services.

The choices can be very limited, and they don't always related to what I'm calling about. You know what I mean: "Press one if..., press 2 if...."

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Sometimes, choices and options are not so simple and easily categorized.

Yet, sometimes the options and choice are obvious.

When afraid or overwhelmed, Psalm 46 seems to be the clear option.

Verse one even states: when in trouble God is our refuge and strength.

When we need protection, then God is like a Mighty Fortress.

A fortress is a safe and secure shelter, yet let's hope we do not always need to hide out in a fortress. That would be very limiting.

In addition, the declaration is general; it does Not specify the reason for use or who qualifies.

The Psalm simply reveals that God is powerful and is a peaceful, reliable place for refuge.

Your needs for protection and safety may be very different than mine.

It does not matter why someone seeks shelter in God, nor does it matter how long a person stays in the fortress.

I like that about the imagery in Psalm 46.

God provides powerful, trustworthy sanctuary for those in trouble.

It's an option, and using that option varies with each person and with the circumstances,..... and that's okay.

And,..... no one is excluded.

God is doing the protecting. God is rescuing, and we are nearly helpless.

However, **we must choose to be still and trust in God.**

That is easier said than done, .... but it's a choice.

Regardless, it is all pretty open ended and universal in invitation.

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We humans seem to like to keep things simple... when we are dealing with others. We are quick to categorize others. Yet, we tend to focus on details, refined definitions and exceptions for ourselves.

That must be why a human does not answer the phone at a customer service line, until the caller is all sorted out.....or out of sorts.

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The Psalm option is a comforting, beautiful invitation in broad brush strokes.

Jeremiah gets into the nitty-gritty: the details of what went wrong.

He also shows that God is proactive in Justice and Righteousness.

Again, we are presented with God taking action; God rescuing God's people.  
In this case, there is no fortress, but God has plans for a new way / a new branch--a wise **king** doing justice and righteousness.

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Well,.....if this was an option to select, then most people would quickly approve. Yet, there is the message to those who follow a different path, and that is beware justice and righteousness are coming.

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Therefore, this options includes many more choices to follow.  
This is like the automated voice saying:  
If you need help, press 1 to hear the menu of options, and there would be many, and there would be sub-menus in those.  
Because doing justice and righteousness is a way of living;  
each day would require affirmation and more choices.

So, Jeremiah's prophecy is complicated. It is a restructuring to end abuse and victims. Truly, it is a desirable option, too.

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And, so it happened. God introduced humanity to the option of a saviour in the flesh.
However, that King label would come to haunt Jesus.
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Fittingly, we end the liturgical year with the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus was accused of claiming to be king, but Jesus never did claim to be king. It did not matter, the masses selected Jesus to die.

The text opens with Jesus being crucified between two criminals.

People are observing the execution as if watching a reality TV show. They are seeing the horror, but doing nothing to stop it.

Soldiers and others are mocking and taunting Jesus.  
Repeatedly, they assert that Jesus, this "saviour of others", is NO saviour because he cannot even save himself.  
They don't understand. They don't grasp that "self saving" is incompatible / counter to the principle of saving others.  
This mocking and abuse is all a set up for the climax, the ultimate choice.

Picture, if you would, Jesus hanging on a cross between two criminals. And, keep in mind, we are all criminals / all guilty.  
One criminal was on the right, and the other on the left

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Luke describes the exchange with the two.

But, do NOT focus on them,... because too often readers do.

This is all about Jesus. Jesus is in the centre. Jesus is the centre of the story, and Jesus is in between two voices.

This episode is a wonderfully crafted representation of choice.

It is like the Yin and the Yang.

It is like the notion of a small self, standing on your shoulder, whispering in one ear and another whispering in the other ear.

The soldiers and others are tempting / daring Jesus to choose / to Not be a helpless victim.

Jesus had the power to silence the crowd.

Jesus had the power to free himself. He had the power to overthrow Rome and be That King.

All of the humanity in Jesus is struggling with what to do.

One voice mocks him and temps him to choose the carnal, selfish and revengeful path.

The other voice reminds Jesus of his calling / his divine nature.

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And,.....Jesus was not a helpless victim. He chose to be the way of God. Jesus chose paradise,.....and.....that was the hardest choice.

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We have many options in life. We must make many choices.

At some point, most or all of us have declared our choice to follow Jesus. That was a wise choice.

Nevertheless, there are occasions when we find ourselves hanging on a cross, tempted to free ourselves, tempted to take a different path.

There are times when trusting God seems absurd or too difficult.

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In those moments, remember Jesus struggling on the cross between two voices.

Remember Jesus' decision.

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Truth be told,.....we only have two significant choices, which affect all other lesser choices.

The options are: God's way as Christ chose.....or the wrong way.