



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Easter Day, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

**(Deuteronomy 30:15-20)** “...therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live.” This 19<sup>th</sup> verse of the 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy summarizes the word God confronted Israel with as they were poised to enter the land that had been promised to their forbears and which stretched out before them. They were confronted with a choice. It was between life and prosperity or death and destruction. If you demonstrate your love of God by walking in his ways the result will be life; but if your heart is drawn after other gods, be they religious objects or things that take God’s place in your affections the result will be total loss. Life and blessing come from loving God and obeying him. In New Testament terms we obey God by believing on his Son.

Easter is all about life—life from the dead—life in place of death. It’s the central theme of the Gospel. Everything the Lord Jesus Christ did was so that we might have life. He laid aside his glory, he became incarnate in the womb of a virgin, he was born in Bethlehem, endured all the struggles associated with being human so that we might have life. This was the reason for his preaching, for his miracles, his death upon the cross, his resurrection, his ascension. He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost so that we might have life.

Death however is still the ultimate dread of men and women. People fear it for all kinds of reasons. One is that they are not certain what is on the other side. Francis Bacon was thinking of this when he said, “Men fear death as children fear the dark.” Another is that though they may suppress the truth about God which they intuitively feel they sense that he really is there, and that they have offended him, and that they must give an account to him for the lives they have lived.

Jesus offers a resurrection unto life, and a resurrection to condemnation and has fixed the destinies of every human being to them. Which destiny is ours is determined by how we respond to this challenge that comes to us from the word of God. ***Choose life that you may live!*** What does the path to life look like? What does it mean to choose life rather than death? The first thing is this: To choose life is to love the Lord your God.

Love is a choice we make. We choose to love people. We have turned it into a weak and sentimental thing. We talk about falling in love as though we would have avoided it if we could. There is a strong, subjective aspect to love. But love is an action of the will. How are we to love the Lord our God? Moses says, by walking in his ways and keeping his commandments. Jesus said the same thing in John 15 when he told his disciples that if they loved him they would obey his commands.

Love has one supreme motive--to please its object. Because we love God we want to please him, to make him happy, and we do that by obeying him. When you love God you do the things he says and you abstain from the things he forbids. John also makes it clear in his first epistle that you cannot love God and hate your brother at the same time. It’s just not possible. If we love him we will also love his people and his word. Jesus Christ will be the center of our lives. That is what it means to love him. If he is shoved off on to the periphery of our thoughts to be brought out twice a year or once a week or when we are in trouble that is not love. Love is about relationship.

To choose the life offered to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is to make knowing Christ the center point of our existence. The one who is life

gives life. To know him is to live by him. The Bible is very clear on this point. Jesus made it clear when he prayed his High priestly prayer in John 17 and said in verse 3 that eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God.

You see, when the Bible talks about life, and especially eternal life, it's not merely the duration of that life it has in mind, though, obviously, eternal life is forever and thank God it is, but it's about the quality of that life, which, like love, is about relationship. Eternal life is a personal and intimate knowledge of the everlasting One. To know God is to relate to God and by such relating to be transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another. This is not knowledge of the divine in some pantheistic sense. It's not a utilitarian knowledge where we know God in order to get something from him.

This is knowledge of the one true God who is revealed in the person of his Son. It's knowledge of Jesus Christ whom God has sent, who is the ultimate access to the knowledge of God. To know Jesus is to know God because he's the face of God—he is God in flesh—God with us—God among us. And this is not just an intellectual matter. We usually use the word to know when we have the intellect in mind as though that is the only kind of knowledge there, but that is not so. In fact, in the Bible the word to know is used for the most intimate acts between men and women. And the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ is about deep, intimate fellowship and trust and relationship and faith.

The point is that there is a choice involved here. The life offered us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ comes through an encounter with God which becomes a life-transforming event when it is welcomed into our lives and embraced with joy. We can turn it away, and people often do.

In a series of essays called *The Words*, Jean Paul Sartre tells how he became an atheist. It was when he was a child. He was educated in Catholic school and one of his assignments was to write a paper on the passion of Christ. Sartre was given a silver medal when he thought he deserved the gold. He deeply resented it and blamed God for it. He wrote, "This disappointment drove me into impiety. For several years more, I maintained public relations with the almighty. But privately, I ceased to associate with him.

There were times in the years that followed when he sensed God's existence—even God's presence. "I had

been playing with matches," he wrote, "And burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw." That is exactly how he puts it. He became aware of God's eyes boring down on him. He continued, "I felt his gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom horribly visible, a live target. Indignation saved me." Sartre says how he flew into a rage against such "so crude an indiscretion." He blasphemed and repeated the words "God damn it" over and over again. And then he writes these remarkable words. "He never looked at me again."

Sartre made a choice and it determined the path he would follow to his life's end. In fact, this explains his whole philosophy of despair. It was a choice he made. Consider what Moses says (verse 17), "***If thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish.***"

In 1988 Krzysztof Kieslowski, a Polish film-maker made a series of one hour movies called The Decalogue. Each of them shows how the choices we make in life have consequences that are often felt many years later. Idolatry, covetousness, adultery, lying, stealing, and so on, often spark events in our lives that lead to ruin. What Sartre did was attempt to banish God from his universe. That was the source of his atheism. Not some great intellectual thought. He simply resented the idea of God watching him, looking down upon him, and the feelings of guilt and shame that evoked for him. So he made a choice. Of course, God never ceased to look at Sartre. The whole enterprise was silly and futile. Indeed, the Apostle Paul spoke of a day when God will judge the secret thoughts of men like Jean Paul Sartre, and show the tragic end of the choices they made.

***Choose life that you may live!*** That's the invitation of the Gospel. It echoes down the corridors of time to our own world and comes to us in the form of what will you do with Christ? That's the most significant choice you will ever make. And upon it will hang your destiny.

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***