

**Spiritual Journey**  
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“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity..... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live....”. Words of God through Moses as the Hebrew people are nearing the land promised them after fleeing slavery. “Life and prosperity, death and adversity” - those are the choices and, in the broader picture, those are the choices God has been offering humans since the beginning. First, it is Adam and Eve with the fruit of good and evil on a tree. Then, Noah is ridiculed for his choice to build a boat on dry land. Abraham is invited to leave his native country and travel to a foreign land. Again, this morning we hear God holding out the choice at the edge of the Jordan. Later, the voices of prophets speak of choosing justice, mercy and love of neighbor. Each time a choice is offered. Each time is a chance to decide to live out of the abundant life God gives or move into actions and thoughts that lead to death, the smaller, diminished life of hate, greed, envy, anger and oppression.

Yet, as either/or, right/wrong, good/bad as the options sound each time, almost never is the choice that clear, is it? Not since the bite of an apple in Eden, have any of us been always absolutely clear and decisive at the time of a choice. Our evolved human brain has the capacity to consider various options and rationalize each choice. The surrounding culture muddies the waters even more with mixed messages of what truly brings life. In our gospel this morning, Jesus points to this honest confusion. “You think murder and adultery are just physical,” Jesus says. “No, it’s not that clear. The death of a body and vows can also happen with thoughts.” And, Jesus gives the example of cutting off an offending hand or tearing out an offensive eye. But, we have two hands and eyes, so it begs the question: which one, which option is truly “right and life”

So, aren’t the choices of death and life offered by God from the beginning be more than just outward actions but also come from the depth of the spirit? As with the physical eating of an apple not being death but the spiritual shame and needing to hide from God? It is said that we are not a human being having a spiritual experience, but a spiritual being having a human experience. If that is true, then we are on a spiritual journey. Our life choices need to be made from inside, not the other way around.

If you've been at Trinity for awhile, you probably know spiritual journey is part of the vocabulary around here. It comes up in sermons, Adult Forums and on our website. You may have even heard another member give their "spiritual autobiography" and wondered how they figured out what to say - and maybe relieved that no one has asked you to give yours....yet! Well, the Deuteronomy and gospel passage started me thinking that our spiritual journey, autobiography, is really the story of when and how we chose life, when we experience the fullness and richness of who we are. And when we come to realize that those times often come about because of either great love or great suffering, probably both. Those times make personal connection with Jesus' human/spiritual journey. From his constant choice of God's life, he loves so completely and deeply that his whole physical being becomes love given even in death. And God takes Jesus' choice of life to show us the abundant life, a life offered also to us.

Yet, for me, while I trust Jesus, want to trust Jesus, I still don't fully understand how I can spiritually grow and choose life more often and sooner. Or, as the apostle Paul writes to Corinth, move from drinking milk to eating solid food, behave less "according to human inclinations." How does that spiritual movement best happen, I wonder. Do you wonder? Well, I don't have an answer, but I do have a story of how this spiritual journey might work.

The journey begins with a soul, the essence of who we are, who we're made in God's image. As an Anglican priest said centuries ago, "The essences of our soul were a breath in God before they lived in the created soul, ...." (William Law, cited in *Becoming Conscious*, Joseph Howell) A look into the eyes of a baby and small child confirms that truth! However, this human experience of the soul soon encounters unavoidable wounds, pain and trauma. To protect ourselves, we create defenses and a matching ego to cover over our vulnerability. Over time and out there, the ego gets stronger and bigger until it seems like our ego fixation is really us, our soul, our essence. Then, our life choices are made more often and easily from our defenses/ego instead of our soul.

Still, God has given us the gift of a soul having a human experience as we travel our life journey. As both Jesus and Paul knew, it is possible to live from our essence and they both mention being like a child. "...unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:2-6).

And in this imagined story of the spiritual journey, the knowledge and opening to soul-choices of life come when we re-member, discover the God-image we each have inside us. Then, we can integrate the wisdom learned through life with the soul-child. Of course, the challenge and struggle to discern which choices are "life and prosperity" and which are "death and adversity" will ever be before us.

Yet, so is God before us with Jesus' light leading us. In the words of a poem/prayer by Anglican priest, George Appleton:

Give me a candle of the spirit, O God  
As I go down into the deep of my  
Own being.  
Show me the hidden things. Take me  
Down to the spring of my life, and  
Tell me my nature and my name.

Give me freedom to grow so that I  
May become my true self- the  
Fulfillment of the seed which you  
Planted in me at my making.

Out of the deep I cry unto thee,  
O God. Amen (George Appleton, cited in *Becoming Conscious*, Joseph Howell)