

## **Choices**

**March 12, 2006**

**Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr**

Choices. We're always faced with choices. It's been said that our experience is the product of our wrong choices and that our right choices are the product of our experience. Throughout our lives we are involved in making monumental and miniscule choices.

When my wife and I were in England this past Christmas we had the opportunity to visit friends of 40 years whom we hadn't seen in at least 15 years. I knew him in the business world. Once when he was visiting us, he had a unique experience trying to order lunch over here. Having looked at the menu, he knew what he wanted: a steak sandwich, a tossed salad and coffee. Before the waitress got through with him, he was confronted with eight choices on the sandwich, six choices on the salad and four choices on the coffee.....eighteen choices and he thought he knew what he wanted.

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When Moses came down from the mountain and brought with him the tablets of the Ten Commandments, (Exodus 20:1-17) he was delivering to his people choices for them to make, for or against God's Law. And in one of the most deeply complex passages Paul ever wrote, we read of his *bewildered helplessness* as he struggled with the turmoil boiling within him over the Law: *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want. I do the very thing I hate* (Rom. 7:15). He, by his own admission, as we so often are, was satisfied with the way he was, untouched by a more worthy standard, and he perceived that it was more fundamental than the quality of our individual choices. He determined that forces which we only partly understand and which we imperfectly control also determine the course and character of the life we live.

In Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, we find Jesus devoured with the desire to purify God's house, to

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empty out those attitudes and practices that obscured the Glory of God and made of God an idol; to depose those who made an improper choice and to bring them to the reality that he, Jesus, God Incarnate was and is and to bring them to the reality of the Kingdom of God. Our choices run from the ridiculous....my friend ordering lunch.....to the sublime....Christ cleansing the Temple.

But we have choices to make on another and lower level, not the agonizing situations when all choices before us seem doomed to lead to some evil consequence, but the everyday situations when a bewildering number of good things claim our attention and we don't know which comes first: home and family, business, hobbies, recreation, the arts, Church, choir, altar guild, knit-wits, the St. Anne's Guild, civic duties. As soon as you begin to list them you know that you cannot number them one, two, three. They are all good and our time and attention have to be divided

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among them. We have to strike a balance. Yet, the advice to those making such choices is the same: ***Seek the Kingdom of God.*** Choose for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness in every department of our lives. The Christian is to make this the standard of her or his choice. It has to become so much a part of us that instinctively we make right choices in the use of our time, our influence, our talents and our money.

Jesus said, ***the kingdom of God is among you.*** There is, in fact no legitimate area of our daily contacts and activities where this principle, the Kingdom, the rule of God in our life and society cannot operate.

A group of people drawn from every kind of home and background choose to meet in common and sincere worship of God....there is the Kingdom. A young couple in the pressures of modern urban or suburban life marries and set out to create a Christian home....there is the Kingdom. An elderly person

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living alone, unable to be very active, chooses by prayers and sheer radiance of faith to alleviate the burdens of others, both here and around the world....there is the Kingdom.

Life and hope springing up in the dark corners of the cities because there are some who choose to care about the hungry, about alcoholics, drug addicts, unmarried mothers, unwanted children and the physical and spiritual slums in which so many live....there is the Kingdom. In a world torn by fears and hates, the presence of Christian love teaching, healing and pointing to the living God....there is the Kingdom.

And in the sanctuary of our own souls, yours and mine, the moment we know beyond any doubt that faith, love, goodness, beauty, joy and peace are more real, more valuable, more important, more *enduring* than any earthly possessions we either own or

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covet....there, too, is the Kingdom of God. And when we choose to admit Christ into our lives, every aspect of our lives, there is the Kingdom.

I've been speaking about choices. Among the less traveled pages of the Prayer Book (p. 832, #58) is this petition: *O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Hear us Lord for we sorely need thee and grant us thy salvation.* **AMEN.**