

Sermon given by The Rt. Rev. Charles Masters, May 11th, 2017 – Prayer Service before the March for Life Ottawa

How grateful I am for this service, and how grateful I am that we're part of a province which spans the borders between Canada and the States and Mexico, the Anglican Church in North America. I know there are folk here who are not part of that church, but we're delighted you're here, and I just want to say that I'm very grateful for our primate for sending, again this year, every year, Canon Jack who, I know, loves Canada. I know you do, and so we're very grateful.

We're very grateful, Georgette, that you're here, and for the teamwork that you and Reverend Vicky Hedelius have for Anglicans for Life and Anglicans for Life Canada.

I want to say, Ken and Michelle and the clergy team and people of St. Peter and St. Paul, this is a very happy thing. I'm glad that everyone's here, and I'm really grateful to have a chance to look for a few minutes at the passage that has been read this morning from Deuteronomy 30. My text actually comes from the last two verses of the passage, Deuteronomy 30, versus 19 and 20.

This is Moses speaking, and he says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the lord your God, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of day, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

For review, the scene in which these incredible words were presented was at a kind of a rally that Moses called with the people of Israel. They're on the east side of the Jordan. Moses is now 120 years old, but he's looking fit for 120. In fact, I don't know –this is not in the text—but I suspect that people said, "Moses, you don't even look 150." I don't know.

He was vital right to the end. Moses longed to go into the Promised Land east of the Jordan, but it's been instructed and made clear several times from God that he is not go in, that he will not go in, and that God will call him on.

This is clearly his swan song. It's his opportunity to review with the people of Israel all that God has done in the past 40 years plus. With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, he freed the people of Israel out of Egypt, by many signs and wonders, brought them through the Red Sea, led them through the wilderness now some 40 years. In fact, sadly, because of their resistance in sin, it required 40 years, and now it's a brand new generation, with only one warrior of the original generation, Caleb, and I guess you could say, Joshua.

Other than that, all the others of that generation had died in the wilderness, and so it's a new crop of people, who at one level need to be informed and renewed and reminded of what God had done, but not just what God had done, but also their own sinfulness, their running after other gods, their reticence to

take God seriously, their reticence to trust Him, and their fearfulness, in terms of what it would mean to go into the promised land.

There's Moses. He has one last opportunity, and this is not uncommon in the Scriptures for these kind of things to happen. This is one ... Deuteronomy for Moses ... Joshua 22 to 24 is Joshua's similar kind, with the people who are in the Promised Land.

Jesus, before the cross, in John 13 to 17, and Paul, to his young protégé, writes in what is called 2 Timothy, a similar kind of letter. A similar kind ... For a person who is a leader and wants to make sure that things are clear, this is what Moses was doing. If you want to understand Moses, if you want to understand Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, go to Deuteronomy, and you get the whole note version, according to Moses, about what this was all about.

What is also clear that Moses makes, is that always, God was merciful and available, and eager to restore what has seems to have been lost and bring them back to the path of life. Here they are, poised, ready, they've defeated the two great kings, and now they're ready. They have made a deal with those Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and that those men will go with them.

All this was in place. That Joshua was to be his successor was in place, as well. Now, in a great crescendo, in a great finale, Moses breaks all of that past, some 30 chapters that we have in scriptures, and brings them to a climax in the passage that we have had read in two languages today.

He says, "See? I've set before you today life and good, death and evil." That's verse 15 of Deuteronomy 3. In a sense, he's kind of like a lawyer presenting a case on two sides, laying them out, or as a salesperson saying, "You can choose this, or you can choose that." But, lest there be any confusion, he's not at all neutral. He's not at *all* neutral. He's just, "Go ahead, choose. It doesn't matter to me. Life, death, blessing, cursing, it's up to you. You choose," in much the same way that Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, says, "Entreat them. Be reconciled to God. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation."

Moses was not neutral. Paul's not neutral, and you can be sure that God is not neutral on this. The call to choose life and good and blessing, as opposed to death and evil and curses is a real one, but not one that God doesn't really care about which you choose.

It would be lunacy to choose death and curses, but the sad facts are that the history of mankind is that, repeatedly, people have done exactly like that. Before us today, in this March that many of us will be part of, we are actually taking, making, declaring our choice, and inviting with Moses, others to make the same choice.

You need to understand that the reason the Father sent the Son, and the word sent is a clear one in the gospel of John. The word "sent" repeatedly comes up, so that, for instance, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life, for God did not send the son into the world, that the world might be condemned."

Later, Jesus says, "As the father sent me, so send I you," so "sending" is a big word, and it's clear that the Father sent the Son because the Father had made His choice concerning life, in creation and now in Jesus, in redemption. Let's just review that for a bit in the gospel of John, just a few verses. If you have your Bibles and want to leaf through with me, and I've taken you all the way from Moses in Deuteronomy to John, but go to John 1, in that great passage. Maybe it's read in your church on Christmas Eve and other times.

It says of Jesus, the word, "In Him," verse four, was, "Life, and the life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus, as the light of the world, the word of God, came to bring life.

Secondly, John 10:10, the contrast, the good shepherd, declares His intentions, as opposed to the thief who is Satan in all His demonic realm. The whole world system aligns itself with Satan in this, and so it should come as no surprise to us that well-intentioned people could actually align themselves with death because that is the agenda of the thief, who is a liar and comes as an angel of life.

Jesus says this. John 10, verse 10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." What an agenda. It doesn't sound that way. It sounds like compassion and dignity and grace and what is legitimate and right, and due choice, and so on. Those are the kind of words which veil the agenda of the evil one and the whole system of death, which is to steal, kill, and destroy.

Jesus goes on and says, and this is truly good news to an otherwise dark world, "But I have come, that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Note that He's not just talking about mere existence. We're not called to be ever-ready bunnies, just percolating along through time, being able to say at the end of the day, "I lived."

This is something of profound, that God is interested in life. Notice, in the Deuteronomy passage, it's about quality of life. It's about abundance of life. It's about relationship with God, through Jesus, which makes life what it's meant to be. This is what God wills for all individuals, and so it is, that for instance, in John 17. Go a little further to the right and then we're going to come back to John 14, but John 17, verse three, in the great high priestly prayer, is part of what I described as the swan song of Jesus before His cross. He says, "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God in Jesus Christ, and you have sinned."

Do you realize that every individual who has ever been conceived or ever will be, that God's agenda, God's longing, God's hope, God's intention, is for relationship with them, which He described as eternal life? Quality, and forever with Him, by virtue of connection with Him.

Go back a few pages to John 14. Again, part of this section is Jesus giving His pep talk and His understanding to the disciples. He said, chapter four, verse one, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to

myself that where I am, there you may be also, and you know the way to where I'm going." Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you're going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the way truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."

The life that we're talking about is here, which is life by virtue of creation. Who called us into existence? Who is the one, by the instrument of our prayers, who brought us into life? It's God alone. Make no mistake. We're answerable to Him. And who is the one who brought us back? You are not your own. You're bought with a price. This is the life that we have.

Jesus said, a little bit further back in John 11, after the death of the now four days Lazarus ... When he's about to call back for life, remember He said, "Lazarus, come out." Jesus has nothing in His tone of voice which is of, "Death is my friend," or "I capitulated with death or maybe we can work this out or whatever."

This is an enemy which He's standing up before and, in a sense, mocking, because he's calling Lazarus who's been dead for these days, and even stinking by virtue of decay, back to life. It's not resurrected life, because Lazarus would have died again, but what Christ does in His resurrection is call us. He says, in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

What we need to understand is the resurrection of Jesus is the definitive blow against death, and sin, and judgment, and Satan. So it is, that for the person who identifies with him, there are only happy days ahead. There is only assurance of life and all its fullness. There is the assurance that everything that was intended is ours in Him, and that's not just for a little clique, a little huddle. "Here we are. Don't tell anybody, or they're going to dilute this thing."

In fact, there's plenty of room at the table. There's room for everybody, and so as we march today, our prayer is for all who will see, and before heaven and earth, that we're declaring and proclaiming life. Good news, life in Jesus. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 24 and 25, "Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom of God to the father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Death is an enemy now, make no mistake, that Jesus defeated. For us to capitulate with death, now, in the light of creation and in the light of the resurrection, would be entirely wrong and deny these facts.

No wonder Paul could say at the end of the great chapter in 1 Corinthians 15, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your Labor in the Lord is not vain."

You know that passage in Philippians 1, where Paul says, "For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain." You might think that this is an argument for maybe choosing death. It's not that at all. In fact, if you follow the passage, you discover that he understands that, as long as God gives him breath, there's purposeful life and

fruit to be born. No matter how old I get, and I'm getting there fast, I am trusting God and believing Him that there'll be fruitful life, because that's the nature of life in Jesus, fruit.

Paul said, "Therefore, do not be ashamed that the testimony about our Lord nor of me, His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace which He gave us in Christ Jesus, before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our savior, Jesus Christ," listen to this, "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

No wonder Moses could give such a resounding summary of all that God had done in this salvation, bringing out of slavery, the freedom from the horrors of all that to the glories of a land flowing with milk and honey. No wonder that he could summon up naan and, boy, you'd be surprised how much you can eat, and all of that. The picture spoke of choosing life and blessings. Choose to walk with God, which is where life is found.

Dear friends, our prayer for people is not just that they hang on and exist. It is that they will find life and life as it's found in Jesus. You see, what happens is that if you terminate life, you rob the multitude from the possibility and the reality of coming into that very relationship. This is a profound and perverse plan of the evil one.

To you today, who are here, with Moses, I proclaim life. I invite you, first of all, to receive life in Jesus, and as I look at your sunshine-y faces, I suspect you all know exactly what I'm talking about. Or maybe you're talking to someone or somehow the word gets out, the invitation, today, at the March for Life, is to receive Jesus and find life in all His forms, because that's the full plan. That's the whole plan.

Choose life. Choose life for yourself. That's number one. Choose to walk with Him, who is the author and perfecter of life. Fix your eyes on Jesus, knowing that He can carry you right through and that when that day comes, when either Jesus returns or you are called through Him, you will know that He's there to meet you, as he promised in John 14.

Choose more than that to proclaim life, and today is a good start, to march. But in your life, in your witness, talk to people about the gift of life, the sanctity of life, about the giver of life, and His character, and how wonderful He is, how good He is, how great are His plans, and how He secured them in Jesus. Make sure you include Jesus in your witness of proclaiming life.

Promote life. Stand up and be counted. Stand up for life in every way and protect life. Let's pray for doctors and nurses who have been charged with the task of doing only good, of doing no harm, and now are caught in this crazy, conflicted, and perverse situation, where they're asking, actually, to facilitate what is absolutely contrary to the stated will of God and His good works.

Let's help him to stand up and protect life, and let us put our own names on the block, as well, and be seen and known to stand for life. Dear friends, if this was just about a position, if this was just a political

argument, it would not be worthy of us traveling miles to get here, of devoting this day. But because it's right at the heart of God, right from the beginning—Moses is talking about the Father of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He's the God of the living because He loves life, because He's the author of life, and therefore, to identify with Him and with Him in Jesus, is to choose life.

Would you stand and pray with me?

Lord Jesus Christ, we're frail flesh, but we stand amazed, because You destroyed death and brought life into mortality. We thank You that we're not just asking people to hang in there and exist or to keep a pregnancy going, but we're pointing people to the author of life, who loves them eternally, who created them with only good in mind, and has saved them in Jesus. We pray, Lord, that You would do something significant through me, through this service, and through this March, to Your glory. Allelujah, because Christ has risen, the Lord has risen indeed. Allelujah. Amen.