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CHOICES

How many of you have read John Milton's great work, Paradise Lost?

- How many of you did so because it was required of you to read it?
- How many of you enjoyed it?

Paradise Lost was first published in 1667 and, when finished, contained twelve books and 10,000 lines of verse.

- It includes two narrative arcs.
  - The first focuses on Satan and other rebel angels waging war against Heaven, losing, and being banished to hell.
  - The second is a ground-breaking domestic epic that examines the intimate relationship between Adam and Eve.
- Milton's writing is big on choice, and Paradise Lost is no exception.
  - Here, Adam and Eve are blissfully living in paradise.
    - But soon, Eve begins to crave more.
    - She wanders off by herself and encounters a beautiful image in a lake, upon looking in, discovers the feelings of compassion and love—love for her own image,
      - and she experiences the first kind of love: self-love.
    - Eve is faced with a choice: stay looking at her reflection in the water or return to Adam.
      - She chooses to be with her partner, and Adam chooses to forgive her.
        - But tensions continue.
      - They have a bitter fight about equality and how their work should be divided equally.
        - Adam, not wanting to threaten Eve's independence chooses to give in.
    - And of course, there's the fruit.
      - Milton gave their actions a positive perspective.
        - Rather than the desire to be like GOD, Milton makes Eve's choice to eat the fruit about the pursuit of wisdom.
        - She, then, debates whether to share the fruit with Adam.
          - She could keep all that she's gained for herself and have superiority over the man.
            - Instead, she hurries to Adam's side to tell him that everything is a lie and to invite him to join her in eating.
          - Now Adam must choose.
            - Adam chooses for her and their life together and eats as well.
            - Adam chooses Eve.

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We make many choices every day.

- Many are small and have little lasting consequences.
  - What flavor of jelly to put on the toast?
  - On which street to turn to get to your destination?
  - What station to watch in the evening?
- But in our lives, we make decisions that can have lasting impacts for us and often for others.
  - Whether to marry this person or not?
  - What career path to follow?
  - Where to live and raise our families?
    - So many choices in our lives.

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*Beatriz at Dinner* is a movie starring Salma Hayek that came out in 2017.

- Beatriz is a massage therapist and healer in Los Angeles.
  - While at the mansion of her client Cathy, Beatriz's car breaks down, so Cathy invites her to stay for a business dinner.
  - One of the guests is Doug Strutt, played by John Lithgow.
    - Strutt is a real estate mogul who hunts big game.
- After Strutt mistakes Beatriz for the help, he asks her if she is a "legal" immigrant, and the tension builds.
  - Finally, after seeing a picture of Strutt's latest hunting trip to Africa, Beatriz says, "You think killing is hard? Try healing. You can break something in two seconds, but it can take forever to fix it."
  - The consequences of the choices we make in how we live our lives.

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In today's gospel, four fishermen had to make a choice.

- Whether to leave the profession they've known for years;
- to walk away from their families;
- to sign on to become fishers of people—whatever that means.

Surely, they were familiar with JESUS.

- HE came from their area.
- HE likely had been doing some teaching and they probably had heard HIM.
- In all likelihood, they had some idea what JESUS was about.

Still, to choose to leave everything is a significant decision, with lasting outcomes.

- But to have chosen not to follow HIM might have had consequences also.

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Sometimes I wonder if we just take it for granted that they followed HIM at once.

- And I suspect that we see their choices as different than our own.
  - After all, most if not all of us are followers of JESUS because we were brought up to be followers of JESUS.
    - There was little or no choice involved.
      - The only choice that may have presented itself before any of us was whether to continue in the faith.
      - Few if any of us have been faced with the decision to leave our home and family and follow JESUS.

Yet even in our faith, we do make important choices.

- What church shall we attend?
- How shall we support the ministry of that church?
- How shall we give our time?
  - Those also can be significant choices.

And on any given Sunday:

- Shall I get up and go to worship services?
- Shall I sing those hymns or not?
- Whom shall I greet during the sharing of the peace?
- Will I stay for fellowship or leave?
- Will I give any more thought to the message and what it might mean for me?

And for that matter on every day:

- How will I connect with GOD today?
  - What prayers will I say and when?
  - Will my faith influence the choices I make today?
  - Will I be a witness to my faith today?
    - Perhaps not as significant as leaving home and family, but significant choices for JESUS' followers, nonetheless.
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How many of you spoke to someone today about the weather?

- The weather is so easy to talk about, isn't it?
  - We talk about it openly and freely because it so deeply affects everyday life.
- The weather is so easy to talk about.
  - So why is it so hard to talk about our faith?
  - Or about GOD, or JESUS, or our church?

I don't know if I have the answer.

- Maybe we fear rejection because religious things can quickly draw lines and cause people to have a great deal of emotion.
  - Maybe we fear that we will be asked a question or challenged in a way that we feel ill-equipped to answer.
  - Maybe we simply don't believe that we know how to tell another about our faith, or GOD, or church.
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Certainly, the disciples in JESUS' day were familiar with scripture.

- It was expected that to be in a right relationship with GOD, one had to attend synagogue each week where they heard the scriptures read and reflected upon.
  - These people had a close sense of relationship with GOD because they saw their lives as being dependent upon GOD.
    - At the same time, they felt distant from GOD who had allowed the Romans to take over their promised land.
      - But they also knew the promises of GOD, especially in the prophets, that GOD would intervene and send a KING, a SAVIOR, a MISSIAH.
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Perhaps, for them, it was not so difficult a choice to follow ONE who announced that, "The Kingdom of GOD has come near."

- "The time is fulfilled."
    - (The term "time" here is not "*Chronos*" meaning minutes and seconds,
      - but "*Kairos*" which is the opportune, even royal time of GOD's action and activity.)
  - GOD is getting involved and will and, in fact, *is* doing something.
    - So, "Come, follow ME."
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Things don't seem so urgent today, at least not in a religious sense or from a faith perspective. Or does it?

- Do we need the values and vision of GOD more than ever today?
- Do we need more people making their choices based on what GOD offers and invites?
- Do we need an ever-growing community of people who seek to love and serve GOD because of what GOD has done for them?
  - Then we have a choice to make.
  - We have to become the voices, and hands, and hearts in the world that GOD needs.
    - Make the choice that JESUS offers today:
      - "Come and follow."