TITLE: Choices….

TEXT: Gen. 1:1, 27-31, 2:15-17; 1 Jn. 4:16; 1 Jn 1:9;

Deut. 30:19-20; Josh. 24:14-15; Jn. 14:23-24

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about choices.

 In Catholicism there is something like, 3000 who have been declared saints by the Catholic Church over the years. Some have had the same name.

 Take St. Francis for instance. The was Saint Frances Xavier the patron missionary saint to Japan that would often be found visiting the sick and infirm in hospitals, and Saint Francis Assisi who was the patron saint of the animals and the environment.

 I tell you this simply to make the story I am about to tell make since.

 It is the story about a man named Joe who inherited a million dollars. The will, however, provided that he had to accept it either in Chile or Brazil. He chose Brazil. Unhappily it turned out that in Chile he would have received his inheritance in land on which uranium, gold and silver had been discovered.

 Once in Brazil, he had to choose between receiving his inheritance in either coffee or nuts. He chose nuts.. Too bad! The bottom fell out of the nut market, and coffee went up $1.50 a pound, wholesale. Poor Joe lost everything that he had to his name.

 He went out and sold his gold watch for the money he needed to fly back home to the states..

 It seemed he had enough money for a plane ticket to either Boston or New York. He chose Boston. When the plane for New York taxied up he noticed that it was a brand new 747 super-jet with all the latest comforts and technology.

 The plane for Boston then arrived. It was an old 1928 ford tri-motor with a sway back. It was filled with crying children and tethered goats and sheep. It seemed that it took all day just to get off the runway.

 Over the Andes Mountains one of the engines fell off.

 Joe made his way to the captain and said, I am a jinx on this plane! Let me out if you want to survive this flight and save your lives. Just give me a parachute.

 The pilot agreed, but added, on this plane, anybody who bails out must wear two parachutes!

 So Joe jumped out of the plane. As he fell through the air, he tried to make up his mind which ripcord to pull. Finally, he chose the one to the left. It was rusty and the wire loop pulled off. So he pulled the other handle.

 This chute opened, but its shroud line snapped. Being a good catholic, in desperation he cried out, St Francis, Save me!

 Just then a hand reached out from the heavens and grabbed poor Joe by the wrist and let him dangle in mid air. Then a gentle but inquisitive voice asked, Saint Francis Xavier or St. Francis Assisi?

Choices! Life is full of them, isn’t it? I had a person once tell me that life would be just great if they weren’t confronted by so many choices.

 But isn’t that what life really is?

 When you analyze life, it is really nothing more than a series of choices.

Just think about this for a moment?

 How is it that each of us starts and ends our day? With a choice! We choose when to get up and we choose when to go to bed. And in-between those two choices there are probably hundreds of other choices that we must make in any given day. Where to go, what to do, what to wear, what to eat, when to eat, what to say, when to say it-- And even the choices that we make in our waking hours can affect us in or un-waking hours.

Example. On Thursday nights Pam and I usually go to Des Moines for dinner. It is our date night. Before coming home we usually stop by Starbucks for coffee.

 Sometimes, as I stand there ordering our coffee to drink on the way home I find myself struggling with another choice!

 Do I want regular coffee or do I want de-café?

 Now for those of you coffee connoisseurs here this morning you know that what makes Starbucks so great is that they serve strong coffee. Regular canned store-bought coffee has something like 150 mil of caffeine in it per cup.

 Starbucks has something like 512 mil of caffeine per cup!

 So, I sometimes I stand there trying to make up my mind which kind of coffee I want that time of night, regular or de-café…

 Now caffeine sometimes has a tendency to keep me up at night especially if I drink it too close to going to bed.

 But, I do prefer regular coffee over de-cafe especially as I am paying $3.50 per cup for it! I want to get all that I can for my money!

 So, more times than not I choose the regular…. I sometimes find I enjoy its effects ALL NIGHT LONG! Just lying in bed, eyes wide open, probably until about 3-4 in the morning…..

 The point is, life is nothing more than a series of choices and the resulting consequences for the choices that we make.

 To understand choices, we need to go back to the beginning…back to the creation of man.

**Genesis 1:1 (NIV)** **1In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

 And then Scripture tells about the six days of creation.

 Six days God created and then He rested from His labor on the 7th day.

 The first 5 days God creates everything in our environment.

 God sets the sun and moon and stars all in place and then makes The land, the water, the sky, dirt, trees, plants, livestock, birds, fish, animals of every kind….

 And then on the six day God creates His grand finale of creation. On the six day God creates man.

 And after He does, like an artist who stands back and looks at his painting, his masterpiece, after the last stroke of the brush, says this is very good!

**Genesis 1:27 - 31 (NIV)**

**26Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”**

**7So God created man in his own image,**

**in the image of God he created him;**

**male and female he created them.**

**28God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”**

**29Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.****30And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.**

**Genesis 2:15 - 17 (NIV)**

**15The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.****16And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;****17but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”**

Question? In the perfection of Gods creative design why did he place a tree in the middle of the garden called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then command man not to have anything to do with it?

**16And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”**

I mean wouldn’t it have been lot easier to simply not put the tree there in the first place then to put it there and then command man not to eat from it?

Why did God place a tree in the garden and then command man not to touch it? What was God purpose in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

 Why even place it in the garden with man?

 The answer is relatively simple…..Choice!

 The tree simply represented choice! The tree simply represented an alternate choice to God.

 Why was that important? Why was that necessary?

 The answer to that question can be summed up in two four letter words….FREE WILL!

 Free will is the one major difference between us and the rest of God’s creation…

 Trees don’t have it, animals, fish and birds don’t have it, plants, rocks and water don’t have it…Only man was created with free will… In fact, it is our free will that really makes us stand out and above the rest of creation.

 Why was free will necessary for man?

 Because free will would be necessary for us to fulfill our role in creation!

What is our role in creation? Just what is it that we were created for? What is it that we were created to do?

LOVE GOD! LOVE GOD! THAT IS IT!

THAT IS OUR PURPOSE! THAT IS WHAT WE WERE CREATED FOR!

 God created man specifically for relationship and fellowship with Himself..

God created us for love. First to be loved and then to love back.

**1 John 4:16 (NIV) 16And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.**

**God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.**

God is not just loving, but God is love. God is the embodiment, the personification of love.

 Now understand this…Love cannot exist in a vacuum…

 Love cannot exist unless there is an object to love.

 You can be the most loving individual on the planet but if you don’t have an object to direct and express that love toward then that loves become literally useless. It would mean absolutely nothing! In fact it couldn’t exist.

 Love needs an object to love in order for love to express itself.

 Man was created for that purpose. To be the recipient of God’s love.

 We were also created for fellowship and relationship with our creator.

 Fellowship, relationship demands something else…

 That we not just become an object that can receive love but that we have the capacity to love back.

And that is where free will comes into the picture.

Free will, the right and ability to choose for ourselves, is necessary before we can receive the Love that is expressed and be able to love back.

Relationships cannot exist without free will, the right to choose.

What makes a relationship a relationship is choice.

What is a marriage? It is a relationship between a man and a woman that have chosen to enter a covenant relationship together!

In order for us to be able to receive Gods love and love Him back demanded that we have choice.

 In the beginning God created and it was good!

 In Gods original design everything was created good. Everything was created in the perfection of God- including man.

 Man was created with a free will so that he could choose God, but without the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there would have been no alternate choice to God to allow man to exercise the free will that he was created with.

 Without the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil man may have loved and served God but it would have been because he had no other choice.

 The tree of the knowledge of good and evil simply represented choice, giving man a way to exercise the free will that he was created with.

 Without free will we would be nothing more than a creation of robots. Programmed to serve and worship God but without choice we would have no capacity to receive or give love. We would have no capacity for relationship and fellowship.

 God didn’t create us just to serve and worship Him as a robot…He created us for relationship and fellowship with Himself, to love and be loved back. That necessitated giving us the ability to choose to love Him or choose not to love Him.

 So God created us as free moral agents…

 And each of us exercises that free will every waking minute of every day..

 From the time that we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night we make choices.

 And in some way, either directly or indirectly, the choice is always the same ….will I choose God or will I not.

 Will I choose to be obedient or will I chose not to be obedient?

 One of my favorite TV shows used to be the Flip Wilson Show…Remember Flip Wison?

 He coined a phrase that became pretty popular in one of his comedy skits…

It was a character that he used to play named Geraldine… Whenever Geraldine would do something that she wasn’t supposed to do and would get caught she would say….The Devil made me do it!

 This one phrase really seemed to catch on with people….

 You would get caught doing something wrong and say…The Devil made me do it!

 Some people I think developed a life theology off of this statement whenever they did wrong or fell short of the mark…. The Devil made me do it.

 Well the fact of the matter is that when we do wrong the Devil didn’t make us do it. The devil may have provided the opportunity for us to do wrong but we made the choice to do it.

 The devil can’t make us do anything. We do what we do because that is the choice that we have made.

 A man really wanted to help his son understand the importance of making right choices, obeying, and doing right. So, if his son made a bad choice or a wrong decision, he'd give him a nail, sent him to a post out in the back yard, and would have him take a hammer and put the nail in the post. And every day that he went through the whole day making good decisions, he'd let him go out and remove one of those nails.

 As the boy grew up from the age of about eight years until about fourteen or fifteen, there were always 2 or 3 or 5 or 10 nails in the post, and he'd be nailing them in and pulling them out.

 But he got better, until finally all the nails were removed as he started to mature. When all the nails were removed, he felt pretty good. Then his dad took him out and said, "I want you to notice something about the post." The boy looked at it for a moment and realized that all the holes where the nails had been placed in the post were still there. His dad said, "I want to tell you something, son, about bad choices.

You may be completely forgiven; there are no nails left -- noproblem there -- but you do have the remaining effects. That post will never be the same again."

 All the choices that we make are very important. God can and will forgive us when we make wrong choices and repent of them and ask His forgiveness.

**I John 1:9…If we Confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgives us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness….**

 We can spend our entire life not choosing God and finally come to a place in our life where we choose Him. Surrender and give our lives to Him at a late date and be totally and completely forgiven and stand to inherit eternal life in His kingdom and that forgiveness is a wonderful thing.

 However the choices that we make will affect the post of our life.

With each choice that we make there is a potential consequence to that choice…..

 Kids talk about "going all the way" in sexual relationships. What they, and we, need to understand is, we have not gone all the way until we stand before God in judgment.

 We are all free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choices.

Example: You may abuse your body with drugs or alcohol for 50 years of your life and then come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. When you do, you stand before God forgiven of all your sin! You stand as an heir of God, a co-heir with Jesus Christ! You are Heaven bound..

 But you may still have cirrhosis of the liver! The nail of drug or alcohol addiction may have been pulled from your life but the damage from the hole may still remain…

All of the choices that we make in this life are of great importance…

On the top of a hill in a Midwestern state stands a courthouse so situated that raindrops falling on one side of the roof travel by way of the Great Lakes into the Atlantic, while drops landing on the opposite side find their way through the Ohio and Mississippi to the Gulf.

 Just a breath of wind one way or the other may determine whether a single raindrop will end up either in the Gulf or in the Atlantic.

 So, it often is in our lives, one single decision is enough to determine our eternal destiny, either heaven or hell.

Especially when it comes to the choice of Jesus….

In the 1960s psychologist Dr. Stanton Samenow and psychiatrist Samuel Yochelson, sharing the conventional wisdom that crime is caused by the environment, set out to prove their point. They began a seventeen-year study, published in 1977, entitled, The Criminal Personality. To their own astonishment, they discovered that the cause of crime cannot be traced to environment, to poverty or oppression. Instead, crime is the result of individuals making, as they put it, wrong moral choices. Samenow and Yochelson concluded that the answer to crime is a "conversion of the wrong-doer to a more responsible lifestyle." In other words…the answer to crime is for people to make better choices…..

 The Devil didn’t make you do it! You chose to do it!

**Deuteronomy 30:19 - 20 (NIV)**

**19This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.**

**Now choose life, so that you and your children may live****20and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

Every day God sets before us the choice between life and death, the choice between blessings and curses.

Whenever we chose Jesus, whenever we choose obedience to God we chose life and blessings….

Whenever we don’t choose Jesus but instead choose disobedience to God we choose death and cursing’s.

It all comes down to the choices that we make…..

 After the death of Moses Joshua faithfully lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua’s life and leadership were marked by the choice of obedience to God.

 Because of it, through his leadership he led the people into the blessings and promise of the Lord…

 When Joshua is old and about to pass on the leadership of the nation to another, he has this challenge for the people….

**Joshua 24:14-15 (NIV)**

**14“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.**

**15But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

And that is the challenge that God has for us today….

The challenge of choice….

**…Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve…**

Will you love and serve the gods of this world? The gods of materialism and secular humanism, the god of self-- or will you love and serve Me?

The choice God leaves to us…..

 What is the choice that you will make?

Will you stand with Joshua and say…

 **But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

Love and obedience always comes down to choice…

 Joni Erickson Tada once wrote: *Always, love is a choice. You come up against scores of opportunities every day to love or not to love.*

*You encounter hundreds of small chances to please your friends, delight your Lord and encourage your family. That's why love and obedience are intimately linked--you can't have one without the other.*

 Do you realize that love is intimately linked to obedience?

 That you can’t have one without the other?

To say that we love God and then disobey Him is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

We prove that we love Him through our obedience.

**John 14:23 - John 14:24 (NIV)**

**23Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.****24He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**

 This morning, have you made the most important of all of life’s choices? Have you made the choice to love God? Have you made the choice to enter into a love relationship with your creator?

 We enter that relationship by choosing to accept Gods Love that was revealed to us in Christ Jesus…

 **That if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord!**

That is how we enter into the relationship! We then maintain that relationship and allow it to grow through the choice of obedience…

Obedience is the testing and proving ground of our love and our faith.

Do all the choices that you make in any given day prove the love that you have for God…

 **If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.**