

Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

“Take note that today I, the LORD your God, have laid out the choices clearly before you. You can choose life and good times or death and hard times. If you live by the rules that I have given you today — if you love me, do things my way, and follow my rules, guidance and instructions — then you will live and flourish. I, the LORD your God, will look after you and make you strong and prosperous in the land I am about to give you.

On the other hand, if you reject me and refuse to listen to me, it will be a very different story. I am warning you in no uncertain terms that if you pursue other objects of devotion and serve them instead of me, your lives will be ruined. You will not last long in the land I am about to give you on the other side of the Jordan River.

Here and now I call on the earth and sky to witness that I have laid out the choices clearly before you; choices between life and death, between being blessed and being cursed. Choose life! Choose life so that you and your children and grandchildren can flourish. Commit yourself to me, the LORD your God, in love and loyalty. Obey what I say and stick with me, because that is the sure-fire recipe for a long and satisfying life in the land that I promised to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Paraphrase by Rev. Nathan Nettleson ©2004 Nathan Nettleton LaughingBird.net

Gospel: Matthew 5:17-23; 27-37

The holy gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 5
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁷ “Don’t even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven’t come to do away with them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I say to you very seriously that as long as heaven and earth exist, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will be erased from the Law until everything there becomes a reality. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever ignores one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same

will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps these commands and teaches people to keep them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ I say to you that unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the legal experts and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, *Don’t commit murder*, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, ‘You fool,’ they will be in danger of fiery hell. ²³ Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift. ²⁵ Be sure to make friends quickly with your opponents while you are with them on the way to court. Otherwise, they will haul you before the judge, the judge will turn you over to the officer of the court, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I say to you in all seriousness that you won’t get out of there until you’ve paid the very last penny.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, *Don’t commit adultery*. ²⁸ But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart. ²⁹ And if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body go into hell.

³³ “Again you have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago: *Don’t make a false solemn pledge, but you should follow through on what you have pledged to the Lord*. ³⁴ But I say to you that you must not pledge at all. You must not pledge by heaven, because it’s God’s throne. ³⁵ You must not pledge by the earth, because it’s God’s footstool. You must not pledge by Jerusalem, because it’s the city of the great king. ³⁶ And you must not pledge by your head, because you can’t turn one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your *yes* mean yes, and your *no* mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.