

## **Sermon for Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2017 Epiphany 6**

**Given by the Revd. Sarah Shaw**

**Deuteronomy 30: 15-20**

**Psalm 119:1-8**

**1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

**Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37**

You may have heard of the new Danny Boyle film, 'Trainspotting 2' which has just come out. It's anticipated to do well at the Box Office, partly because it's a sequel to that iconic film of the same name which was released in the mid- 1990s. The original film follows the lives and relationships of a group of Edinburgh friends, caught up in hard drugs and crime. It was difficult viewing to say the least when it came out. Many people at the time, too, criticised it for glamorising a lifestyle of drug addiction and crime. And it appears that the sequel will have similar themes. But I think its merit was in getting the viewer to reflect on what it means to truly live, not just exist.

You may remember the strapline of the original film was 'Choose life.' The film began with 'Choose life. Then followed a litany of what a normal life might be: 'Choose a mortgage, choose a car, choose holidays,' ending with the main character's comment. He says, 'Choose life. But why would I want to do a thing like that? I chose not to choose life. I chose heroin.'

The film posits a choice between the normality of ordinary life (with its decisions of where to live, what car to buy, where to go on holiday) versus one spent centred on the excitement of drugs, paid for by crime. And the film doesn't stop short of exposing the viewer to the repercussions of this destructive lifestyle. Perhaps the intention of the director was to help us understand, just a little bit, why someone might get drawn into that kind of life.

Most of us don't choose that kind of life – but all of us, particularly we as Christians need to reflect on what it means to truly live – to 'Choose life'. As the writer of Deuteronomy also says (many thousands of years before it appeared in

‘Trainspotting’): ‘God says to his people, ‘I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live.’

Many of us, fortunately, are never faced with the choice of a life of hard drugs and crime. But all of us, every day, have to make choices that are either life-giving – truly life-giving - the best kind of life that God wants for us – or the opposite. And this is more than just about what we do with our bodies – although that may come into it. Healthy food, avoiding too much of the things that are bad for us, may well be part of what God wants for us.

But it is more than that. Choosing life is about choosing life in all its fullness. Life that has no relationship to our physical life or death, but is about two things. Love God, love others. This is what choosing life means. Life in all its fullness for everyone.

It sounds simple but of course it needs a bit of unpacking. And today’s readings help us do that. So in our first reading we heard that ‘choosing life’ means ‘loving God, obeying him and holding fast to him.’ Obeying God means doing what he would have us do, and clinging to him, being as close to him as we possibly can be in order to see the world with his eyes, in order to discern how we should live our lives. And the Psalmist of today’s Psalm gives us a clue: Blessed are they... that seek him with their whole heart.’ Our energies, our prayers, our thoughts need to be directed to God in a continual conversation with him.

We do not have a set of rules for every decision we need to make in life. Our faith is not about following a set of rules. In the Gospel reading, Jesus is concerned to say that the way we direct our lives needs to go beyond and deeper than mere laws. The Law given by Moses required one thing - now, Jesus is saying, you need to see things in God’s way. It is what is in your heart that matters. It’s not about saying ‘I haven’t committed murder,’ if meanwhile we’re determined to stay angry with that person who’s upset us. Be reconciled with them! It’s not about saying ‘I haven’t committed adultery’ if we’re not loving in words or actions to the people we have our primary relationships with. How we are with others matters. Are we life-giving, or life-sapping? We need to pray to see others as God does, love them as God does – mercifully, faithfully and gently. This is what it means to choose life – not just for ourselves, but for others.

And of course choosing life in all its fullness is not only about our relationships with those around us, but our care for our neighbour, who could be anyone and anywhere. There's a lot in the news at the moment about political decisions which appear, in my mind, to be about something much less than love, something less than choosing life for all people. I wonder what the idea of 'life in all its fullness' means if you are living in a war zone, or if you're a refugee on the move and finding that every border is shut to you? Is this truly living, or merely existing?

Particularly on my mind is our government's decision to end the provision of the Dubs amendment, which was going to allow 3,500 unaccompanied refugee minors into this country, but is now to be stopped after only 350. By way of background, an estimated 10,000 minors have gone missing in Europe. Many of these are teenage boys who are being trafficked or sold into slavery. And I'm going to be political about this. Because if we read Scripture honestly we can't avoid being confronted with the number of times that God requires his people to be compassionate to aliens and foreigners. Indeed, these groups are consistently listed alongside widows and orphans as those needing compassion - the most vulnerable people of those times.

It seems to me that today's refugees, of which there are around 60 million, are now among our most vulnerable people. So as Christians I think it is incumbent on us to stand alongside those in need, whether in this country or not, and to pray, help, and give what we can to alleviate the current crisis. There are various ways of doing this. One of them is to say to those refugees who are already here 'We welcome you.' The Scottish Episcopal Church is funding the charity Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees with £12,000 to help their work, and we are one of several churches in Edinburgh who have offered to host welcome days for refugees. Our first one is on 8<sup>th</sup> April and we are looking for volunteers, so please offer to help if you can. More details will appear in pew sheets and in The Sign.

In terms of pressuring the government to allow more refugees asylum in the UK, there are petitions available through Citizens UK online, or you can write to your MP or MSP. There's also offering financial help. Let's not forget those millions of refugees in limbo in countries like Greece, Serbia and the Middle East. Christian Aid are working with these refugees and donations to their work are most welcome. And

finally – there is prayer. All things are possible with God, and prayer is our way of uniting our wills with God to see his Kingdom come.

In our Offertory hymn we will sing: 'When will the Kingdom come? When will the world be generous to all instead of some?' I firmly believe that God is in control – that his Kingdom will come. Yet, in the meantime, God gives us the dignity of working with him, of looking at the world and other people through his eyes, to be people who practice mercy, forgiveness, respect and compassion. Let's choose life, in all its fullness, for everyone.