

Sermon "Choosing Life"
 Kirk of St James
 Sunday October 11, 2026
 Kirk of St James

One year a man called using the Talk-Line as more of a confessional, not really asking a question. He was letting the expert on the call know that, in his experience, the cold-water-thaw method doesn't really work. Curious, the Butterball hotline operator asked what he meant, because they use that thaw method all the time at Butterball. His response: "I put it in the pool, and when I came back it was missing."

A few hours after his wife had given birth, a new dad called the Butterball hotline to make sure the turkey hadn't been thawing too long while he'd been at the hospital. The Talk-Line staffer asked how much it weighed, to which the flustered father replied, "The turkey or the baby?" After determining the turkey's weight and thawing time, she assured him he would be able to deliver a safe, delicious Thanksgiving dinner by the time mom and baby got home.

One woman was getting worried. Her turkey had been in the oven for seven hours and was still only 140 degrees, when Butterball recommends cooking it to 165 or 180 degrees. The Talk-Line operator figured there was no way it was still undercooked and asked the caller to take it out of the oven and try carving it. Suddenly, there was a burst of laughter in the background. "When she went to pick the turkey up and put on the carving board, the whole thing just disintegrated into pieces," the operator says. "It wasn't that the turkey wasn't done, it was the thermometer that wasn't working..."

When a Talk-Line staffer asked a caller what state her turkey was in (meaning how thawed it was), the caller responded with "Florida."

Sometimes when things go wrong, it is good to be reminded that there is humor to be found. A shift in how we view something, how we choose to respond, can make a world of difference in our lives. Stories like these are fun, because at worst people didn't have the perfectly cooked turkey they envisioned. In other cases, however, the situations we find ourselves in can be far more complex and the choices we make have far reaching consequences. When we turn to the Israelites in Exodus today, we find the people face to face with a problem,

and there is no humorous way out. Moses had climbed the mountain to meet God, and then just disappeared, and now they are left with fears and unknowns.

For thirty days they sit there waiting, with no idea what is happening, the murmuring, the wondering, the whispers, as the days continue to slip by. Was he dead? Was God displeased with Moses? No matter how many times God shows up for the Israelites they never trust him to show up the next time. Fire, wind, water, food, miracle after miracle, answered prayer after answered prayer, and still the people doubt. So, they make a choice. Done with waiting it is time to take matters into their own hands. I have always wondered about parts of this story because they make no sense.

Why does Aaron agree to make the golden calf? Why doesn't he just tell them to be patient and trust? He has had a front row seat to everything that Moses has been doing. There doesn't appear to be a fight, or a deep conversation with the people, he simply does what is asked. "The people want this idol created, fine have it your own way." On top of that, even though they know it is not true they try to say, "This is what led us out of Egypt." Clearly not, it just came into existence. No one involved in this account are making good choices.

Moments like these with the Israelites remind us of what it is to be human. Often times we know what we should do but, for whatever reason we just cannot bring ourselves to do it. Paul says this in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." I know what I need to do to keep my body healthy--drink water, exercise, eat a balanced diet, unfortunately it doesn't mean I do them. That same premise extends to all areas of our lives. That is what New Years resolutions are all about. Trying to make the changes we need to live in a more balanced way. It is not easy, sometimes because of circumstance, and sometimes by choice.

The Israelites are no different, they want answers, they want something tangible, and they make choices that are harmful. They choose things that do not give life. One writer said “We choose death when we ignore God and choose anything inferior. Death is a slow process of giving ourselves to what does not matter. Modern life is impoverished with a lack of purpose. We rush to meet deadlines that are insignificant and bow before ideas that are not worthy.” Time and again however, God meets us in our lives and reminds us to choose life. Choose the things that matter. Simple in practice, incredibly difficult in the execution.

I would like to close today by sharing with you some of the ways one writer suggests we choose life. She wrote “Love God with all your mind, heart and soul. Give to the poor. Fight for justice. Care for the hurting. Treat others fairly. Share food with the hungry.... enjoy simple things. Play with children. Laugh often, long, and loud. Cry when it is time to cry. Be patient with your own imperfections as well as the imperfections of others...walk around the block...Get together with your friends. Invite a stranger to a meal...Quit doing what is not worth your time. Do something so someone else won't have to...Apologize to someone even if it was mostly their fault. Forgive someone even if they don't deserve it. Have patience. Stop having patience when it is time to tell the truth. Figure out what you hope for and live with that hope. Worship with all your heart. Pray genuinely. Love your church. Believe God loves you. Remember the stories of Jesus. See Christ in the people around you. Share God's love with someone who has forgotten it. Delight in God's good gifts. See that all of life is holy. Open your heart to the spirit. Search for something deeper and better than your own comfort. Live in the joy beneath it all. Let God make your life wonderful.”

I must admit when I first read that I thought it was lovely, poetic advice, but was not sure it was really all that helpful. But the more I think about it, the more I think I understand where

they are coming from. Choose life giving practices. We all get into habits and routines, that are hurtful to us. Whether we burn the candle at both ends, do not treat ourselves with love, do not treat others with love or forgiveness, and so on. We live lives that hurt us rather than heal us. We choose the little inconsequential things, over the things that truly matter. There have been times when I have had to force myself to do things I did not want to do, in order to choose life. Sometimes it is hard to heal those parts of our lives that have been hurt and broken. Maybe as the writer suggested we heal by making one small choice for life after the other. We do not do everything in on grand sweep, but in one step at a time. May we too, choose those things that give us life, and heal us so that we may be transformed more and more into the likeness of God. May we be thankful that God walks everyday of this journey with us.