

Series: Words & Deeds Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”  
“Choices Have Consequences”  
Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18  
Psalm 90:1-8, 12  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11  
Matthew 25:14-30

There is abundance and accountability in Christian living. And the choices we make in this regard are significant for our journey as Christians. Scarcity or Abundance? Fear or hope? Walking the long road is a series of actions loving God and others. In fact, walking this long road of actions demonstrates how the events, people, actions, and spiritual practices of humans are interconnected...life is highly interconnected. We are all in this together.<sup>1</sup> Except, we often feel that a remnant of folk value interconnectedness more than others. What is a higher value? Unity or autonomy? Do we prefer the long road being more often straight or crooked? Our choices have intended and unintended consequences. Robert Klose lives in a crooked house. As a first-time homebuyer, he was initially alarmed by all the noise his century-old house made.

At every sound, Robert would sit up and say, “The place is falling apart.” Seventeen years later, he’s used to it. It’s other people, like his carpenter Mike, who don’t appreciate it. “Bob, your house is crooked,” Mike declared. He was right. I could see it in the floors, the ceilings, the roofline, the doorjamb, even the window frames. Drop a ball on the floor, and it will roll away into oblivion. Open a door and don’t worry about forgetting to close it—she’ll take care of that herself. There are windows that haven’t been opened in years because they can’t be.... Mike the carpenter worked for me with great reluctance. I understood his frustration—his measurements meant nothing, because nothing in my house was square, nothing was level, and it seemed that, in places, nothing was holding the place together. Mike’s advice? “Get out while the getting’s good.”<sup>2</sup>

Robert decided that fixing the crooked house was impossible. He decided to live with it.

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<sup>1</sup>I attribute the articulation of interconnectedness of life in this paragraph to Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 218.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Klose, “Life in a Crooked House,” *Christian Science Monitor*, (8-22-05).

Many of us work hard at avoiding our interconnected dependence on and with one another and God, regardless of how “crooked” things may be. Like Robert, we just live with it. Remnant people, however, work hard at correcting crooked ways to move more fully into the straightway of interconnectedness and unity. Karyn L. Wiseman writes, “Today humans live in a world that tends to separate us through technology, unlimited mobility, and familial isolation. However, that is not the end of the story. In the Christian life, everything that we have completed, seen, believed, and experienced comes together in judgment day in ways that remind us of our interconnectedness.”<sup>3</sup> Geneva is facing its reality of being a remnant with decisions to make about relevance, societal and cultural changes, the emerging definition of what church is to be, and the need for depth and critical thinking. Being a faithful and obedient remnant, addressing the issues previously cited, requires each one of us to participate, because we are a family interconnected with one another and God.

Psalms 90:1-8, 12, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, and Matthew 25:14-30 confirm the point made in Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18: it’s time to live like a remnant, which requires sole faithfulness and obedience to the one true God. First, we must acknowledge the relationship between sin and death. Sin is a causal break in what life is meant to be now and eternally. Second, we must acknowledge the day of judgement is coming. There is pressure against being Christians. This pressure is greater or lesser given the circumstances, times, and places in which we live. The fluidity of history is very real. And third, God offers us gifts, which we are to use to shape lives, communities, and futures. Avoid petty jealousies or resentments about the gifts we wish to possess or don’t have. We need to live fully, in gratitude and generously, out of the gifts we have

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<sup>3</sup>Karyn L. Wiseman in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 291, 293.

received. Remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus is not static.<sup>4</sup> Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins*, writes,

...If something is wrong with your God, if your God is loving one second and cruel the next, if your God will punish people for all of eternity for sins committed in a few short years, no amount of clever marketing or compelling language or good music or good coffee will be able to disguise that one, true, glaring, unacceptable, awful reality. Hell is refusing to trust, and refusing to trust is often rooted in a distorted view of God. Sometimes the reason people have a problem accepting “the gospel” is that they sense that the God lurking behind Jesus isn’t safe, loving, or good. It doesn’t make sense, it can’t be reconciled, and so they say no. They don’t want anything to do with Jesus, because they don’t want anything to do with that God.<sup>5</sup>

Remnant people choose faithfulness and obedience in viewing God as safe, loving, and good.

#### 2024 Generosity Campaign Points for Success<sup>6</sup>

- i. Psalm 46: 1-3 Because of our previous overspending and use of one-time assets, even with one pastor and some trimming of other staff expenses, we need as far as possible to maintain (or increase) our current level of financial giving. (October 1, 2023)
- ii. Hebrews 12: 1-3 With a reduced staff, we will be more reliant on volunteer activity in many areas. (October 8, 2023)
- iii. Romans 12: 3-8 Supporting Geneva can take many forms, from financial giving to volunteering in missional life, congregational life, administration, or other areas — and simply connecting within or outside the congregation or praying. (October 8, 2023)
- iv. Mark 12: 41-46 We recognize that people’s ability to support via financial or volunteer activities may vary, given different financial situations, health situations, or other commitments — and so we ask people to help to the extent that they feel called and able in their current circumstances. (October 15, 2023)
- v. 1 Peter 4: 8-11 As we try to find a path that includes both a degree of continuity and a degree of change, and that tries to be effective in both our evangelical and social-justice commitments in a changing society, we value the support of every single person who is invested in Geneva. (October 22, 2023)

Living as an interconnected remnant of followers of Jesus, focused on Jesus’s way, is of paramount significance. For others see Jesus and begin to want something to do with God. It’s

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<sup>4</sup>In the paragraph of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Kenneth N. Ngwa, Wm. Marcus Small, Kimberly Bracken Long, Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Lee Hull Moses, Laura Mariko Cheifetz, and Kate Ott in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 475-478, 478-480, 481-483, 484-486, 486-487, 488-490, and 490-492.

<sup>5</sup>Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 175-176.

<sup>6</sup>Source is Ruling Elder John Pomery.

all about choices my friends with intended and unintended consequences. One of my covenant brothers, the Rev. Dr. Steve Hein, relates the following story:

Steve was on safari in Africa. The guide was very clear on instructions, one in particular. “When I say, stop and don’t move, you must stop and not move.” Towards the end of the safari on the last leg back to the start of the journey, the guide stated, “Stop and don’t move.” Everything in Steve’s mind and heart resisted obedience. He actually thought he knew better and would run for safety. In the bush fifty yards away, to the right of the group, was a bull elephant. Eventually, the elephant scampered off. Steve asked the guide what would have happened if the bull elephant had charged the group. The guide, without missing a beat stated, “I would have run toward the elephant.”

It takes remnant thinking and choices to walk the long road, in a straighter and less crooked way.

Humanity has lost its way. We must rediscover that there is an end to life, with consequences and an ethical standard for how to live. God is the moral standard. God is our sovereign judge and humans must take responsibility for their actions. Syndicated Op-Ed Columnist David Brooks writes, “Freedom without covenant becomes selfishness. And that’s what we see at the top of society, in our politics, and the financial crisis. Freedom without connection becomes alienation, and that’s what we see at the bottom of society—frayed communities, broken families, opiate addiction. Freedom without a unifying national narrative becomes distrust, polarization, and permanent political war.”<sup>7</sup> Christians have a common narrative, to live the redemptive purposes of God.

Christians are secure in God’s covenantal promise. God is for humanity, not against it.

Let us share that good news with others. That’s an important choice. Amen.

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 19 November 2023  
by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church  
in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>7</sup>David Brooks, “Our Elites Still Don’t Get It” in *The New York Times*, November 17, 2017.