

Proper 18 – Year C – September 8, 2019
Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Psalm 1 Philemon 1-21 Luke 14:25-33
the Rev. Deborah Kempson-Thompson

In a land far away and long ago,
lived a ruler who felt that justice
was best meted out by choice and chance
rather than subjective judgment.
He felt so strongly about this principle
that he built a great arena where
his scheme could play itself out
among criminals, opponents of his reign
and those who incurred the ruler's ire.
Our mythical ruler had two doors constructed
at the far end of the arena—
Behind one door a hungry tiger was poised to spring—
to overcoming, and devouring the miscreant in the arena.
Behind the other door stood a Lady, a bride, waiting
to be given in marriage to the accused.
When the ruler's beloved daughter fell in love with a man
of whom the ruler disapproved,

the ruler had that man arrested and

sentenced to the arena

to choose the Lady or the tiger.

When brought forward to make his choice,

the young man looked up to the gallery where

the princess was seated;

Searching her face for a sign

that she knew behind which door awaited the

Lady or the tiger signaling

that all would be well with him,

he saw her lips form

an almost imperceptible smile.

Reassured, he stood taller and

waited for her to signal.

He would have been less assured had he been

privy to the debate the princess was having within herself—

Should she indicate the door from which

the Lady would emerge,

granting life to the object of her royal affection

but spelling death to her dreams of

married life with her lover?

Should she indicate the door from which

the tiger would spring,

certain to kill lover,

but sparing her the agony of losing him?

He watched as she made a slight gesture of her hand

toward the door on her right.

Poised on this precipice of choice

did the princess choose life or death for her lover—

the Lady or the tiger?ⁱ

Either way, her choice will cost her something –

Sometimes, perhaps more often than we like to admit,

Choosing to do good might cost us

Our relationships,

Our dreams

Our comforts,

Our time.

We always have a choice.

As General Joshua proposed to the Hebrew people

as they occupied the Promised Land:

*"If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD,
choose for yourselves today whom you will serve:
as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.*

Serving the Lord

is to choose the way of the God's love—

selfless living over self-interest.

Joshua was reiterating

what long before YHW had spoken through the prophet Moses:

*See, I have set before you today
life and prosperity,
death and adversityⁱⁱ*

adversity.

For the Hebrews, life and prosperity is known as

shalom—

peace.

Shalom includes more than economic success or freedom from strife:

In the Bible, the word shalom is most commonly used to refer to a state of affairs--one of wellbeing, tranquility, prosperity, and security, circumstances unblemished by any sort of defect. Shalom is a blessing, a manifestation of divine grace.”

Shalom is the opposite of *death and adversity*.

Shalom depends on intimacy with God and cooperation with

creation—

a spiritual alliance that requires continual,

ever-evolving choices that are

consistent with what is known and

experienced to be true—

Shalom – inner peace and confidence in God’s grace.

For the Hebrews, truth was found in

the gift of the Ten Commandments

lived honestly and sincerely in community and

in thanksgiving for that gift through worship.

Shalom Aleichem- Peace to you—

is the result of daily choosing the way of YWH

The choices presented to us in today’s epistle and gospel

are that same choice—

Do we choose a life of inner peace, wholeness, and charity

or death experienced as anxiety, fear, and selfishness?

Do we love the one and hate the other

enough to lay aside our own preferences

to prefer God's ways?

*For God has not given us a cowardly spirit but
a spirit of power, love, and sound judgment.*

This is a love story, a story of shalom in the midst of strife:

*In the course of human existence, many people are tested.
Only a few soar as eagles and achieve greatness by simple acts of
kindness, thoughtfulness and humanity.*

*This is the story Chiune and Yukiko Sugihara who, when
confronted with evil, obeyed the kindness of their hearts and
consciences in defiance of the orders of an indifferent government.*

In 1939,

Thousands of Polish Jews,

having left their country after the invasion by Hitler's army,

Gathered before the gates of the Japanese embassy in Lithuania

asylum and transit visas.

Sympathetic, Sugihara wired his government in Tokyo

for permission to grant the visas.

Permission was denied,

In fact the envoy and his family were recalled to Japan.

Chiune and his wife Yukiko even feared for their lives and the lives of their children, but in the end, could only follow their consciences. The visas would be signed.

Requesting an extension for their departure date,

the Sugiharas signed more than 300 visas

a day for the Polish Refugees, risking

their careers, their livelihood and their future to save the lives of more than 6,000 Jews. This selfless act resulted in the second largest number of Jews rescued from the Nazis.ⁱⁱⁱ

Each day, we are called to

choose life by responding to our circumstances,

as well as the circumstances of other people.

Spirit calls us to respond from what we know and

have experienced

to be a true reflection of God's love for us.

Perhaps we will be asked to deliver only one person from

sorrow, despair, or poverty,

by providing friendship or charitable donations—

by sharing stories of being loved and

giving of ourselves and our possessions freely.

Paul wrote Philemon to spare just one person,

*I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective
when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.*

Our faith becomes *effective* when afford

the same opportunities to flourish

as Christ has provided us.

Our faith is *ineffective* when we hoard

forgiveness,

compassion, and

charity.

Philemon is called to forgive and set free

as he has been forgiven and freed in Christ Jesus;

he is called upon to befriend someone

unlike himself

as he was befriended by Paul.

In the gospel of Luke this morning,

Jesus lays before his disciples and us

the ancient choice:

*Choose this day between life and prosperity
or death and adversity.*

Shalom.

Whom shall we serve?

Ourselves or God?

Jesus is explicit as to his choice —

He set his face toward Jerusalem

to face condemnation and suffering

in order to spare the lives of his followers.

Jesus exhorts his disciples and us to follow in his way.

Miseo – *renounce one choice in favor of a better one.*

Do not allow family, friends, and your own plans—

anyone or anything—

interfere with choosing

Eternal life born on the wings

of selflessness and,

sometimes, self-sacrifice.

Not expediency, money,

not immediate pleasure is

worth forfeiting the Kingdom of God—

The command to *miseo*

is always before us:

Will we choose

the Lady or the tiger?

Shalom

ⁱ "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is a much-anthologized short story written by Frank R. Stockton for publication in the magazine *The Century* in 1882. [Wikipedia](#)

ⁱⁱ Dt. 30.15 "

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/chiune-sugihara>