

One of the hardest things about being an adult, it seems to me, is having to make so many big decisions. As children, we are blissfully ignorant to the decisions our parents make for us. As teens, we often rebel over the decisions that are made for us by others. But as adults, we have the burden to make decisions for ourselves and sometimes those decisions are excruciating. And of course, at some point we make a bad decision – or even perhaps a truly horrible decision that has lasting consequences. If our decision was bad enough, we may be frightened of making another decision anytime soon and we might have trouble forgiving ourselves. I have personally made many good decisions – but I have also made some very bad ones. When I step back and reflect I have noted that a theme or pattern has emerged in those decisive moments and it is a theme that is addressed in our Old Testament lesson today.

Allow me to offer one example of a bad decision I made – it wasn't one of the biggest decisions of my life, but it had a big impact on me at the time...it was the first time I bought a car. I was 17 years old and had saved almost several thousand dollars working part time. To say I was of the age when I thought I knew everything and that my parents and other adults knew nothing would be an understatement. And so I walked boldly on to the used car lot and immediately saw it: the cool black vintage BMW. It had some obvious wear and tear but it was in my price range and the mileage was surprisingly low. I stood there staring, coveting this car. I really, really wanted it. A little voice inside my head said, "I don't know if this is a good idea, something doesn't seem quite right." I angrily silenced that voice and took it for a test drive. I felt great behind the wheel of this vehicle- it even had a sunroof. It was such a good deal I said. But the voice persisted. I silenced it again as I made an offer to buy it. And I was ecstatic...until I got in the car to drive home with my first major purchase in life and suddenly noticed that the odometer wasn't moving...at all. It was stuck. How long had it been that way? Had it been stuck for the past 10 years? Before I could finish my thought, I realized the heater was blowing cold air and was broken. And the stereo cut on and off. Why didn't I see this before? And this was only the beginning. Over the next several months that car turned out to be one of the worst lemons and headaches imaginable. When I brought it in to get new brakes, the mechanic told me that the vehicle had been in a major accident and the frame of the car itself had been broken and welded back together by an amateur...he said that is wasn't even safe to drive. The day the gear box literally dropped out of the car and out on to the middle of the street leaving a gaping hole where the stick shift used to be, I was almost happy to

scrap it. It was a total loss. And I thought about that car and my decision many times – and realized the error of my ways.

Whenever we make a bad decision we have the opportunity to learn from it. This is true whether the decision is about our careers, our relationships, our children, our finances, our homes, our retirement or any other major decision. And fortunately, God is in the business of redeeming our bad decisions. But what if we could avoid some of the bad decisions in the first place?

Our Scripture lesson from Genesis today offers a faith based model for decision making. In it we read about Abraham's servant who has been sent on a mission to find a wife for Isaac. Notice how he accomplishes his task: he prays to God to bring the right woman across his path. He will know her because she will be kind...not only in offering water to him, but in offering water to his camels. Then he meets Rebekah and she does just that. The decision is not finalized of course until Rebekah agrees to it, which is surprisingly egalitarian for these ancient times, but the Divine hand is demonstrated several times in the story including the moment when Rebekah recognizes Isaac while he is still a long way off.

What is remarkable about the simple faith of Abraham's servant is that it is rooted in his trust in God's love. Earlier in verse 12 of this same chapter the servant prays, "O Lord.... grant me success today and show your steadfast love to my master." The word he uses for "love" in Hebrew is "hesed" and signifies the kind of love that arises from a loving relationship in which the stronger party helps and assists the weaker one. His trust in God's love is the foundation of the servant's faith and this guides his decision in choosing Rebekah for Isaac. And at each step of the way the servant stops to pray and watches for evidence of God's hand.

While the servant's approach may seem rather simplistic at face value, Jesus speaks in support of simple faith throughout the Gospels and in our reading today when Jesus thanks God that many spiritual truths have been revealed to "infants" and hidden from the "wise." Jesus is not speaking about literal infants or babies. "Infants" here is a metaphor for the unlearned, the uneducated, those who are not among the intelligentsia or elite. The "wise" are contrasted with the infants. The "wise" are those Jesus terms the "sophos" ...these are the sophisticated, the learned, the religious teachers, and the philosophers. It isn't that Jesus is speaking in favor of anti-intellectualism but he is

warning about an intellectualism that leads to the overshadowing of a simple trust and faith in God.

According to Pew Research in 2014, among all U.S. adults, college graduates are considerably less likely than those who have less education to say religion is “very important” in their lives: Fewer than half of college graduates (46%) say this, compared with nearly six-in-ten of those with no more than a high school education (58%). Highly educated Americans also are less inclined than others to pray daily. Are those who have more education, who are often more socially privileged, smarter or more in the know than those without one? Do the well-educated have an inside track on spiritual truth? Not according to Jesus. In fact, the Gospels seem to indicate that our intellects and knowledge can get in the way of our heart and spirit—sometimes they become more of an obstacle as we trust our own thinking, our own knowledge, and even our own desires, rather than God. I know I’m guilty of this at times. And we Episcopalians, being the most highly educated people of all denominations, run this risk.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were so impressed with all their knowledge that they had created a heavy burden for the people. They developed what they called the “yoke of the Law” – a complex set of rules and regulations. This yoke was crushing, especially to ordinary people, many of whom were just trying to survive and couldn’t afford, quite literally, to follow all the regulations being imposed. Jesus speaks of a very different “yoke.” He says, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Jesus’ “yoke” is based in that child-like, simple faith in God’s love for us. It draws us out of our heads and back into our hearts inviting us to pray and lean on God for all things -including major decisions. Had I stopped to pray and leaned on God in faith, looking for the clear signs in my path– I’m sure I would not have purchased that wretched automobile. I chose to wear a yoke that depended on my intellect and desire...and so the car itself became a heavy yoke upon my neck. Anyone can attain this kind of faith by asking for it and then relying on God in prayer, believing that God loves you and has your best in mind for you - it doesn’t matter how much or how little education you have. This simple faith is our guide in decisions great and small and reminds us that no matter what we do or decide, God will be there on the other side to lead, love, and redeem us. Amen.