



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 6, 2009  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Hebrews 11:24-28  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 7:8-13  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 71  
Second Lesson: Hebrews 11:24-28  
Gospel: John 6:60-69

**Appearances Can be Deceiving**

“Obvious” choices  
Faithful choices

Over the years I’ve looked at a number of science fair projects that my children have done and other children have done. It seems like year after year you see a lot of the same kinds of things. Some are pretty interesting. One that’s kind of stuck with me is one that one of our babysitters’ did, and I remember when I first saw it in Minnesota. I’ve seen it done again here. It’s a display of candy and medicine and how some candy you might have around the house looks just like medicine. I thought that was kind of an interesting thing to look at because I could certainly see, through a little kid’s eye, how some of those pills can look like a Tic Tac or some other kind of candy or some other thing, and how a kid could pick it up and stick it in their mouth to enjoy. Well, if as a little kid you’d pick up one of those pills or some medicine and think you’ve found some candy, you might have found a whole world of trouble, right? Appearances can be deceiving. What looks like it’s going to be fun and sweet and tasty could actually contain death, right?

It’s not a science fair poster board, but I think the same exact lesson is taught for us today in what we just read in Hebrews 11. Sometimes in life, as we walk through life, humanly speaking, there are choices that we have put before us that on the outward side of it look pretty obvious. This is the obvious choice to make. A slave or living in the palace. Humanly speaking not much of a choice, right?

Well, we’re reminded then as Christians, as we go through life, these appearances can be deceiving of these obvious choices. And we’re probably reminded by God to slow down a beat, take a breath and reconsider some of the obvious choices that we probably have fallen into during our lifetime. Consider them again and look at them with the opportunity to make faithful choices, faithful to our God who is faithful to us first.

We see that in Moses. The question then becomes, how do we see that in our own lives? All of those choices that each of us will face this week or the next, what’s the obvious choice and what’s the faithful choice?

Look at what Hebrews 11 says about faith and how faith is being certain of things that aren’t seen. What you see is relying on human wisdom and human reason, right? If you look on the face of it, human reason, what you could see would say, living in Pharaoh’s palace is a good thing; living as a slave is a bad thing. I don’t think you’d get

any argument from your human reason with that, would you? Humanly speaking, do you think some people thought Moses was just nuts when he grew up and realized who he was and what he was, and because he said, "I'm not going to live as Pharaoh's son anymore. I'm not going to enjoy one of the world's powers and all that it has to offer or all the riches of being a part of that palace and all the benefits that it offers. I am going to turn my back on it and instead I'm going to suffer disgrace for the sake of my God and live as a slave in a country that's not my own, among a people that despise me and my God." Humanly speaking, would you make that choice? Of course not.

It has to be something more than our reason that directs someone like Moses or us to make some of the choices that we make. But look at what it says there. It says he chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as a greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward. The faithful choice for Moses was to keep his God foremost in his mind; service to God, living for God, doing what the Lord would have him do. And in order to live closer to God, I would think it became obvious to him that he needed to live with God's people and not among the Egyptians with all the temptations, with all the distractions, with all the false worship of other gods that the palace had to offer, along with the other benefits. He saw the threats to his relationship to God and he turned his back on what humanly speaking was a foolish choice, and yet he made it. It was a faithful choice and he is commended by God for acting out of faith, trusting God instead of what his eyes could see.

Another example is mentioned of Moses operating by faith and not by what his eyes could see. Later when he came back, after he had fled Egypt, when he came back and God had told him to lead his people out, remember how Moses gave God so many excuses about how he shouldn't be the one to do it? He had about eight different excuses. God finally just said "Shut up and go." And he went. But when he got there, the people didn't want to listen to him. Pharaoh obviously didn't listen to him over and over and over. We heard that in our First Lesson. Yet here he is, having to tell the people, "Here's the 10<sup>th</sup> plague now. The firstborn of everything in Egypt is going to be killed. Animal, person, it doesn't matter. But here's the answer for you so that you won't be killed. Take a lamb without blemish or defect, a male about a year old. Kill it, take the blood, and put some of it on your doorpost, on the sides and on the top. Then the Angel of Death won't kill you." Humanly speaking, does that make any sense at all? Blood keeps away the Angel of Death. Humanly speaking, this Angel of Death stuff had to sound kind of goofy, didn't it? Humanly speaking, putting blood on a doorpost, what could it possibly do? But by faith Moses had to speak to the people and say, "This is what God has said. I don't care if your reason gets it or not. God has said it and that settles it. Now do it." Then, by acting in faith, they saw how God kept his promise and the firstborn of Israel wasn't destroyed, those who listened to God. Now humanly speaking, the obvious choice would have been to not do such an outwardly looking silly thing. But the faithful choice was to trust God's promise in spite of what human reason said.

We see that in Moses. I'm not going to tell you Moses did this all the time. Like I just said a minute ago, he whined and complained about God choosing him to lead the people out. He said, "I tried and it didn't work God." He wasn't completely always faithful, but when he did operate by faith, he made faithful choices as opposed to the obvious choice.

You and I, we know our imperfections. You know in your own mind. You've probably already started thinking about what I said earlier. Look back maybe to your younger years and all the obvious choices that you made that look pretty stupid now when you look back at them. You know how you have sinned. I know how I have sinned against God. So the devil wants to tell you that because you made those obvious choices, because you screwed up, because you put God off to the side, God can't love you anymore.

But our God has a different message, doesn't he? He uses the same thing we just talked about. He uses blood to tell us that he still loves us. He uses his own blood, the blood of Jesus who lived and died in our place to take away all those times when we make the obvious choice. He uses that same blood today when we come to the Sacrament of the altar. It's there, in, with and under the bread and wine. Humanly speaking, does that make any sense at all to you? No. I can't explain it to you with reason. In fact, I don't want to. I just want to say this is what God says. Put your trust in what God says. Set aside your human intellect and say, "Here is what the God, who made the world by saying 'Let there be,' and there was, says to me. There in the wafer and in the wine is his body and blood, and in receiving it and trusting in his promises, I am forgiven." I don't need to explain it. I just need to rejoice when I receive it. And by God's grace, you and I can. By God's grace, you and I do.

So as we go forward in the future, we know we've screwed up in the past. We've made the obvious choice. But as we go forward in the future, how do we start making the faithful choice? How do we look at the things that are put in front of us and say, "Lord, help me so that I don't keep doing things that my human reason says, 'oh, this will be good. This will be fun. This will be enjoyable.'"

Well, first of all, know you are never going to do it perfectly. Secondly, know that God has done it perfectly in your place already. Jesus made every perfect choice for us when he lived and died in our place. Then, because he has done that for you, keep that act of Jesus in front of your vision and then you will start to want to make faithful choices. It won't be about, "what do I have to do so that I don't get into trouble?" It will be, "what do I want to do so that I serve my God faithfully?"

There are going to be all kinds of these obvious choices at times in our lives. Sometimes they are going to deal with our relationships with others, when someone that we are good friends with or family members or something like that are caught up in things that we know are against God's will. The obvious choice so that there isn't strife or drama in our relationship with this person is to keep our mouth shut, right? Change the subject. Talk about football. Talk about something else. Talk about the weather.

Talk about talking about something else. It's an obvious choice when human reason says, "You don't want to say anything because they'll stop listening to you. They'll no longer be your friend. It will cost you a good friend." Think of how that kind of obvious human reason plays out in peer pressure in your younger years. When you get together with a crowd of your friends, you can do some pretty stupid stuff that you wouldn't do normally on your own, but you don't want to speak up because you don't want to lose a friend or be looked at as something less than what you want others to think of you.

Sometimes the faithful choice involves a little bit of pain, a little bit of suffering. The devil's temptation, as you make that choice that involves a little bit of pain and a little bit of suffering, is to say, "Woe is me. How could God make me have to make that choice? Serving God shouldn't be bringing me pain" and so on and so forth. The devil will have all those temptations waiting for your mind. And when you stop and think about those whines the devil induces in us when we suffer consequences for being faithful to God, they really make absolutely no sense at all.

Service to God involves difficulty at times. If you want an example of that, look at Jesus Christ. He served God on our behalf, and look at what he had to go through for it. He gets up in front of the people and says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." The people said, "No you're not. We know who you are. You're nuts." They turned their back on him and left him, even those who had been close to him. Do you think that hurt him a little bit?

Did he soften the message? Did he change the message? Did he change it to, "I am kind of a wafer that came down from heaven"? No, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. You have to eat me, believe in me, and then you have eternal life." He didn't change the message. He just endured the heartache of seeing people turn their backs on his message.

Jesus says that as we imitate the teacher, we are going to suffer the same things that he, the teacher, suffered. So don't buy into Satan's whines about how this is unfair and I have to suffer because I am living for God and God should be making everything wonderful for me. God has made everything wonderful for you. You wake up in the morning and you open your eyes and you are a forgiven child of God. You lay your head on the pillow and you close your eyes at night and you are still a forgiven child of God. Through his grace, he has given you the gift of faith to believe that Christ took away your sins. That includes all the stupid things you did between opening your eyes and shutting them. God takes away every last one of them. That's being awfully good to us. That's giving us the greatest blessing we could possibly have. He's opened the door to heaven.

If in this world we suffer because we make faithful choices, so be it. We want to keep our eyes on him who is invisible as it says, like Moses did, and then we will find great joy in serving God with faithful choices. And we won't be deceived by the appearance of obvious choices.