

Based on the merits  
UUF

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There was a man who lived some 400-500 years ago, in Cambridge England. He owned a livery stable, a large livery stable with some 40 horses for rent. {triva people, don't give it away, but raise your hands if you know who this is} At some point he realized his best horses were the only ones people seemed to want to rent. As a result they regularly came back tired and well used while the other horses got little or no use and no exercise. They were growing fat while the favorite horses were in regular need of re-shoeing.

Being a good business manager and one who took good care of his animals, he knew he had to do something. One day he finally decided how to better manage the rotation of his horses. It included his understanding that his customers would want to decide which horse they would like to have.

He devised an ingenious method for managing the use of his horses while still allowing his customers a choice. From that day forward he offered potential customers two choices. They could either choose to rent the horse nearest the door or they could choose to not rent a horse.

Initially some of his customers complained "why, that's no choice at all!" His response was clear and to the point. Of course they had a choice. "You have two options to choose between; rent a horse or choose not to". Little did he know he would become famous for his ingenious approach. Over time his approach became known as a Hobson's choice, named after Thomas Hobson (1544-1631).

Some choices are easy to make. If you had to take a journey that was simply too far to walk, the choice to rent the horse nearest the door was easy. Some might even call it a no-brainer. Henry Ford is said to have offered his customers the same choice. They could buy his cars in any color they wanted as long as it was black. Some choices are easy.

Other choices might be more difficult. Either because there are numerous options to choose between or because the criteria used for the decision is less clear. People who've studied decision making tell us there are differing criteria on which to base a decision. Brian Tracy, lays out four different types of decision making approaches, thought mechanisms if you will.

First, he names the obvious: "rational thought". I suspect this is what most of us believe we do when we make decisions. After all, it is the best way, the "right", the mature way of making decisions. Isn't it? Certainly, it's the grown-up way!

Or he says, you can make a decision based on intuition. He calls it intuitive decision making. I once read a book on managerial decision making which said 3 out of every 5 decisions a manager makes are made intuitively---they then amass data to support their decision.

Another type of decision making---these are all choices by the way--- is a decision or choice based on recognition. That's how many young people make decisions about sneakers—Nike, Air Jordan. Based on little other data, we often make choices based on whether we recognize the name. In the political world it's called name recognition.

Lastly, and maybe most frequently, we make decisions based on some combination of the above.

Tracy, also talks about the way we implement choices.

He says one can make a "command decision", which means you are the only one capable of making the decision, as in the Commander in Chief. ... the choice to get married or take another job---while you may well be influenced or coerced, ultimately only you can make such a decision. The outcome is as a result of your choice.

Alternately, one can delegate the choice or decision. How often do couples have a conversation that goes like this? "Where do you want to eat or which movie do you want to see?" "Oh I don't care, you decide." How many decisions in any given day do we delegate? (I sometimes wonder if the tendency to delegate such decisions is gender based!).

Then, there are decisions that are to be avoided. Such a decision is a choice. Some might say, “that decision is above my pay grade”. Other such decisions are the ones that risk death or serious injury. A friend of mine recently went sky-diving---and she was no spring chicken! Although tempted many times, that’s a decision I’ve managed to avoid.

Tracy lists two other types of decisions. One he calls the “no-brainer”, where the choice is obvious. And one he refers to as a collaborative decision. That’s a decision made in consultation with, and by agreement with others.

The collaborative decision is the type of choice making I want to spend some time talking about in a bit more detail. I’ll come back to it. But first I want to explore some additional aspects of decision making. That is to say, making a choice, choosing.

I want to hold up the importance of being intentional in our choice making. So many decisions, or choices, we make during the day, we make without conscious thought. Our typical morning routine is seldom done with fore-thought or conscious intent. That’s why we call it a routine. It’s well rehearsed, it’s normal, it’s just what we do.

I suspect, much of our lives are lived by routine. That is, without thought and without intentionality. The Buddhist say washing the dishes can be a meditation. Washing the dishes can be a task that needs to be done. Or, it can be an opportunity to tune into the moment. It can be a time to daydream, plan tomorrows’ calendar or a time to focus. A time to be in the here and now, fully present.

Either way, we are making a choice. We either make the choice to be present to the moment or we make the choice to “be” somewhere else. Often that “somewhere else” is to be, lost in thought.

I don’t intend to be Polly Anna. I don’t intend to make a mountain out of a molehill. My intent is to encourage us all, to more often, choose to be more fully present. Choosing to be present allows us the opportunity to be more open, more aware. It slows us down so we don’t always feel we are rushing from one thing to another. It opens us, it makes space...it invites Grace and joy to enter our lives.

Choosing to be present means choosing to engage what is real. Carl Jung is quoted as saying, “what we resist, persists”. He was talking about Shadow, that aspect of self we do not acknowledge or claim. But I think the phrase “what we resist, persists” applies to other aspects of ourselves as well.

The other day I felt “out of sorts”. I couldn’t get myself going in the morning. I couldn’t focus. I felt as if I was in a fog. I felt lost. I tried to push it away. I tried to figure it out. I tried to ignore it and soldier on with what I needed to get done. It didn’t work. It seemed as if nothing I did had any impact. I still felt out of sorts.

Eventually, I just gave in to it. I accepted I was in a funk. In the middle of the day, I went in to take a nap. I didn’t even do that well. I never fell asleep! But at some point I did begin to feel better. My head began to clear. My body didn’t feel as tense, tight or dense.

I had stopped judging myself. I had stopped making myself “wrong” for feeling the way I felt. I was able to find myself again by being in the moment with what was real.

Choice is always available to us. Even when we don’t think we have a choice, we can choose to take the horse nearest the door or choose not to take a horse at all. Choice is always available. Even when we choose to believe there is no choice. We may not be able to choose a specific horse, but that does not mean we lack choice.

We can choose to be upset by not having our choice of choices or we can decide to deal with what is. Even when it is not our personal preference.

I now want to cycle back to the collaborative choice model. Some choices we make have nothing to do with who we are or how we see ourselves. Buying an item of utility, like a fire extinguisher, Brian Tracy tells us, has little to do with how we see ourselves. Items of utility has little to do with self-concept.

That’s not the case when we buy items on which we place meaning. Buying perfume or clothes or home decorations are infused with a sense of self. Such choices are made with a sense of self-identity; they’re experienced as an extension of self-identity.

Some decisions are made based on ego needs. They are made solely or primarily with the intent of satisfying a very personal need or want. Such choices can be made rationally---“I want to make a good impression on my new boss or that new hottie”. Sometimes, such a choice is made intuitively---it just feels right, or I’d feel uncomfortable doing it otherwise.

Other choices are made with the ‘greater good’ in mind. That’s what team play is about. That’s the way businesses need to operate. All are asked to make choices that are to the benefit of the greater whole. It is a wholly rational type of decision making. We all benefit by working together. It’s the same basis on which many people choose to be monogamous. They make a rational choice in service of a longer term good vs short term, self gratification.

I’m now going to bring the larger point home. Hang with me here.

This year, as a faith community, we have embarked on a process to identify a mission for this congregation. We will be significantly benefited by being intentional in deciding who we want to be, choosing how we want to be in the world; choosing what we want to accomplish; how we want to be seen and known.

While all of us have ego needs, all of us have our own personal wants and preferences, if we are to truly be a WE, instead of a collection of me(s), we will need to make a collaborative choice. That choice may be a rational one, that choice may be intuitive, it may be a no-brainer. However we get there, it must be collaborative.

Let me spell it out clearly. The process of choosing a mission for this congregation requires that we each choose to put the good of the whole above our immediate ego needs and personal preferences. It means we must define ourselves in terms of “We”, not only “I”.

At the same time, we can not ignore or resist who we are as individuals. We can not fail to see and accept others as equal partners in this endeavor. The WE of who we define ourselves to be, and how we want to be, has to make room for all the “me(s)” among us.

As we move forward in this process, we must ask ourselves and each other, to stay in the moment, to choose to be open to what is. Let each of us encourage and support each other in being our better selves, placing the greater good above our personal wants and needs.

Soon, based on your previous input, the Committee on Ministry will present to you a first draft of a proposed congregational mission. As before, when we created our congregational covenant, we'll be looking for your feedback and support in clarifying our mission.

A clear mission will illuminate our path into the future. Let us, together, go forth and prosper.

Amen