

# A Matter of Choice

Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Matthew 4:18-22

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

15<sup>th</sup> August 2010

What do you think of the case of Omar Khadr that is so much in the news at the moment? This is, of course, the young Canadian who was captured by American forces at the age of 15 following a firefight with militants in an Afghanistan village back in 2002. Since then he has been held in Guantanamo Bay accused of war crimes and providing support for terrorism after allegedly throwing a grenade that killed a US soldier. Now, 8 years later, he has finally been put on trial before a military tribunal, although proceedings have been delayed this week due to Khadr's lawyer being taken ill and having to return to the US for treatment.

Do you think it's possible for Khadr to get a fair trial at Guantanamo? It would seem to me that the odds are very much against this. After all, he is being tried by a group of people whose mindset is anything but objective. The judges are members of the US military. The prosecutors are members of the US military. Khadr's lawyer is a member of the US military. And the jury, far from being a group of the accused's peers, is made up of serving US military personnel sympathetic to the Prosecution's case. During jury selection, those who expressed any reservations about Guantanamo, or detainee treatment, or confessions exacted under torture, or trying 15 year olds as adults, were immediately dismissed.<sup>1</sup>

What do you think of the way in which the Canadian government has treated Khadr during his 8 years in Guantanamo Bay? At the beginning of the Obama presidency, the US offered Canada the opportunity of repatriating Khadr and holding him to account through the Canadian legal system. But this was rejected by our government in Ottawa, as was the ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Federal Court of Appeals that Khadr's Charter Rights had been violated by his detention and treatment at Guantanamo, decreeing that he should be returned to Canada as soon as possible. These decisions were welcomed by various international organisations such as UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as Amnesty International<sup>2</sup> and a host of others who saw that trying a child soldier on a charge of war crimes was patently wrong. Yet, still, the Canadian Government has refused to have anything to do with Khadr – even, amazingly, spending \$1.3 million to ensure that the young man remains in Guantanamo.

Did Omar Khadr actually throw the grenade that allegedly killed, the American soldier. Sgt. Christopher Speer? The evidence seems to be very circumstantial. A team of American soldiers, at the time, was searching for an elderly Afghani man in a wheelchair who was one of

the insurgents' principal bomb-makers. During the search of particular houses and huts in a small village south of Kabul a firefight broke out with gunfire and grenades coming from both sides. None of the witnesses actually saw Khadr throwing the grenade that killed the American soldier. Different witnesses gave conflicting reports due to the fact that there were lots of dust clouds swirling around. Some thought they saw Khadr with a grenade. Others thought they saw him holding a gun. Others weren't sure they had actually seen him at all. Seemingly, Khadr was out of sight crouched behind a wall in the compound during the conflict. When found, he had been severely injured by shrapnel that had blinded him in one eye and shot twice in the back.<sup>3</sup>

When we read about these events, it is very difficult to piece together what actually happened on that day back in 2002. Just as we come to believe one side of the story and make up our minds that we know what really happened, a conflicting view emerges. And we change our standpoint because the new view seems more plausible. Only to have that view challenged by yet another one that makes us change our position again ... and yet again.

Is it possible for anyone to know what actually happened that day? I think not. The problem is that there is just not enough hard evidence to allow us to come to any firm conclusions whatsoever. Maybe the trial will bring the facts more firmly into focus. But given its inbuilt bias, one would think this is highly unlikely. Maybe we'll have to wait until a more balanced presentation becomes available before we really know the truth of the matter. Until then the best we can do is to suspend judgement in the hope that more conclusive evidence will emerge sometime in the future.

Suspend judgement. This is something we so often have to do in such cases that we read and hear about in the papers or on TV. Whether it be a war-related story like Omar Khadr or in the case of a murder or a mystery here in Canada where there are just not enough details in the public domain to enable us to make up our minds.

Suspend judgement. That's OK when we are dealing with events that happen at arms' length and at a distance. But, in our own lives from day to day, we are in a much different situation. We are not bystanders or independent observers who have the luxury of suspending judgement. No. Life comes at us fast and demands choices. Not some time in the future. But right now.

We are constantly being faced with choices. Will we move from our home to an apartment? Should we switch our investments or leave them where they are? Should we opt for surgery or wait and see how our condition

develops? Should we advise our children to take this road in life or that one? Should we continue to support the Maple Leafs this season or look for a winning team!

So many decisions like these knock on our door every day and call for us to make up our minds quickly. And, usually, before we know all the facts.

The people of Israel, in their day also found themselves faced with stark decisions that demanded immediate decisions. As they prepared to cross the river Jordan into Canaan, Moses challenged them to choose between good and evil, between obedience and disobedience to the law, between keeping the covenant or breaking it. Between serving the one true God or worshipping idols.

But, true to human nature, the Israelites wanted to put off making such choices. They wanted to suspend judgement. Maybe they would get to the Promised Land and discover they could do without God or perhaps find another, better god who would be less demanding and give them a better deal.

Moses, though would have no truck with such procrastination. He would allow no suspended judgement. You have to choose right now, he said. And the choice is a far-reaching one. A choice that will affect your ancestors for generations to come. A choice between nothing less than life and death. So, he urged, choose life.<sup>4</sup>

As Christians today, like the Israelites, we want to wait and see. Many of us say we have considered the claims of Christianity from all angles but there is just not enough evidence to make an informed decision. So we suspend judgement pending further evidence coming to light. As a result, we sit on the fence. Bearing the name of Christian. But refusing to commit to living out the reality of that name.

One writer says that many of us are “of course” Christians. “If,” he says, “I were to ask you, ‘Are you a Christian?’ you might say ‘Of course. My parents are Christians. I have gone to church all my life. I am not Jewish or Buddhist or even agnostic. Of course, I am a Christian.’ Unfortunately, the world is filled with ‘of course’ Christians. That’s different, though, from the kind of Christian that follows Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> “Of course” Christians are uncommitted Christians. Wait-and-see Christians. Suspended-judgement Christians. Christians in name but not in practice.

However, just as Moses would have no truck with undecided Israelites, similarly Jesus does not suffer uncommitted Christians. “Follow me,” he says to us, as bluntly as he did to the disciples of old.<sup>6</sup> “Follow me now. Not tomorrow. Not when you have examined every theological issue. Not when further evidence for my historical existence comes in. No. Do it now. Make up your mind and commit yourself wholeheartedly to me. Take my side against all others in this world.”

How difficult it is, of course, to come down off the

fence and say once-and-for all that we believe utterly and absolutely in Jesus Christ and will serve him unconditionally with our whole being! But when we do there is a great reward.

In 1996, at the age of 25, champion racing cyclist Lance Armstrong, discovered he had advanced testicular cancer that had metastasized to his brain and lungs. After radical medical treatment, his cancer went into remission. During this time, Armstrong became very withdrawn, depressed, living life in a very self-indulgent way, playing golf and drinking beer. But his wife at that time confronted him one day and asked him if he really had endured such painful cancer treatment just to become an unmotivated couch potato. Or, was he going to commit himself totally to the sport of cycling. You have to make up your mind, she said. And you have to do it now. This stark choice galvanised Armstrong into action. He plunged himself wholeheartedly into training and ... well, the rest is history. He proceeded to win the Tour de France 7 times in a row.<sup>7</sup>

When, like this, we commit ourselves totally to a cause, we reap the reward of becoming, almost immediately, more fully energised. More fully energised, in our case, for the cause of Jesus Christ. More fully energised to achieve greater things for our Lord and Saviour. Not only that, when we have this new focus, our whole life will become more enriched and more fulfilling than ever before.

So don’t put off. Don’t suspend judgement. Don’t wait and see. Do it now. Choose life. Choose Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Mehler Paperny, “And then there were 7”, *The Globe and Mail*, August 11, 2010, [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> “Omar Khadr: Repatriation Is The Only Option”,

[www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca)

<sup>3</sup> Omar Khadr, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 30:11-20

<sup>5</sup> King Duncan, “Choices”, *Dynamic Preaching*, 2006,

[www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com)

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 4:18-22

<sup>7</sup> King Duncan, “Choosing Christ at The Cross-roads”,

*Dynamic Preaching*, 2005, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com)