

Hobson's Choice

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Charlie Buctin in Craig Silvey's book, **Jasper Jones**, recently released as a film of the same title, has a mother that regularly gives him a number of choices, none of which are ones he wishes to make. In anger, when he stands up to her, she tells him to dig a hole in the garden. If he does not, she will confine him to his bedroom for the rest of the summer holidays.

Jasper also finds himself making a choice he does not want when he finds the beaten body of his best friend, Laura, hanging from the tree of his secret place. He is an Aboriginal boy who is automatically blamed for any mischief that occurs in the town. Regardless of what he does – going to the police and reporting the matter or leaving the body where it is – he is likely to be in dire trouble. Reluctantly he decides to share his dilemma with Charlie because he is the only one he believes he can trust. Neither of them wants to make the choice they eventually make.

A young woman, seeking asylum in Australia, is informed that she must return to her country of origin where she believes she will be killed, if not by her violent husband then by the government because of her involvement in the opposition movement. The government of her country is currently arresting, at best, and killing, at worst, members of the opposition. If she refuses to return to her country she will lose what benefits she has been able to access through various NGOs in Australia and will be pursued by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection who will forcibly deport her and hand her to her country's government officials.

If you were in any of these positions, what would you choose?

We are witnessing a similar Hobson's choice for the men detained on Manus Island of whom over 80% have been accepted as asylum seekers under the charter of the UNHCR. All services, including water, electricity and food have been closed down by the Australian government. They have been told they must leave their current accommodation for new, partially built accommodation in Lorengau. Residents on Manus Island don't want them on the island and are angry with the Australian government. The townspeople of Lorengau are particularly angry because the accommodation units have been built on private land without consultation. As a result of the anger that has built up against the Australian government and, by proxy, against the men seeking asylum, the men are very anxious about their safety, citing numerous incidents when they have been attacked by police and citizens alike. These men include Farhad, a Kurdish classical guitar maker and the Iranian award winning journalist, Behrouz Boochani as well as a Rohingya man whose people are currently being brutally treated by the Myanmar (Burmese) military (villages burnt, rape and killing of women and girls, murdering boys and men), actions labelled as genocide by the UNHCR.

Their choice? Move into the community or return to their countries of origin. What would you choose?

In a similar situation how would you like to be treated? If you were a government minister upholding the central Christian values of compassion, generosity, justice, mercy and tolerance, how might you respond? How might you make a difference to people in need of your compassion, generosity and belief in justice?

Reflect back to a time when you had to make a choice, probably with less dangerous consequences. How did you make the choice? How did it feel? Who supported you? How did it change you?