

Easter 6B 05 May 2024  
John 15:9-17  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*[Jesus said:] "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit." Let's pray:*

Last week, we heard that we must abide in Jesus and he in us in order to be able to produce the gospel fruit of faith and good works. To be an extension of his love, just as bunches of grapes are the extension of the vine upon which they rely. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. This week, Jesus expands his teaching to provide encouragement and reassurance that even the most unlikely saint, is capable of things beyond human comprehension, because they're chosen by God himself. "You did not choose me, but I chose you." It's true. Jesus chooses his disciples. And when he does, he's continuing a long tradition that we see throughout scripture, and throughout the history of the church, of God choosing unlikely people to accomplish surprising tasks.

So, let's stroll through scripture, and as we do, I want you to think about how God has chosen you, too; and what that means for your life of faith.

Genesis reveals many examples of people being chosen by God for surprising tasks; people like Noah, Abraham, and Sarah. But let's consider Joseph. The most loved of Jacob's twelve sons. The one with the coat of many colours. The one whose brothers sold him to Ishmaelites who took Joseph to Egypt.

Joseph became quite successful in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and helped Egypt prepare for a great famine. God had a plan for Joseph, as we hear as he forgives his brothers: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (Genesis 50:20). God chose Joseph to preserve God's chosen people.

God also chose Moses to preserve God's chosen people, and to free them from slavery in Egypt. Moses should have died as a baby, according to Pharaoh's decree. But his mother entrusted him to God by sending him down the river in a papyrus basket (ark). Pharaoh's daughter spotted the basket and rescued the baby, and Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household.

As he grew and saw the cruel treatment of his people, he retaliated and killed an Egyptian. He fled to Midian, got married, and became a shepherd. Then, God called him to confront Pharaoh and lead God's people to freedom by crossing on dry ground, through the Red Sea (Exodus 14).

And then there's David; the least likely to be anointed king by Samuel. But he was a brave and mighty warrior who defended his sheep, killing lions and bears. He also brought down Goliath. A poet and musician who became a great leader; but most of all, a man after God's own heart. Chosen by God to reign over God's people.

I must also mention Mary, the young virgin from Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. Such an unexpected choice. But Mary had a remarkable faith, an open heart, and a willingness to do whatever God asked of her.

There are plenty of examples in scripture of people being chosen by God, whose only qualification was that they were chosen by God for his purposes.

Jesus continued this long tradition of making surprising choices to do God's work. The disciples were no different. Fishermen, a tax collector, certainly no religious leaders among them. No rabbis, no scholars. If we were asked to pick a team to start the church, none of the disciples would be on our list. The only thing they had going for them was that Jesus chose them.

In that upper room, right before Jesus' arrest, Jesus could see that his disciples needed to be reminded that he chose them. They were all frightened, anxious, confused, knowing that Judas had just left to betray Jesus. Jesus also told them that Peter would soon deny even knowing him.

Jesus commanded them to love one another, reminded them to abide in him, and told them that he'd be leaving soon, to prepare a place for them. They really didn't know what to think of any of this, but they needed to remember that Jesus chose them. They didn't choose him. He chose those particular people to continue to bring Jesus into this world, and to bear his fruit, the everlasting fruit of the gospel. I'm sure they didn't feel confident, except for one very important thing: Jesus chose them.

How many times would they lean on that assurance? How many times would they remind themselves that they didn't choose Jesus; he chose them? When they were ignored or laughed at? When they were hated and persecuted? Imprisoned? When some of them were even killed? How many times did they remind themselves that God's own Son chose them, and he chose them for a reason? Jesus chose them and entrusted them with his mission, to go and bear kingdom fruit, and they would succeed as long as they remained in him.

The disciples were chosen by Jesus for a particular purpose in this world. But they're not the only ones. In fact, if scripture tells us anything, it's that we, too, have been chosen by God for a particular purpose in this world.

St Paul tells us that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world for a particular purpose, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:10); that we're, "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12).

St Peter tells us that we're "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:9,10). Chosen by God to proclaim God's mighty acts. Hand-picked to bear the fruit of God's love in this world.

The truth, is that when each of us were baptised, we were chosen by Jesus to bear the particular fruit that only we can bear, to do the particular task that only we can do. We didn't choose this, but Jesus chose us and appointed us for his holy work.

Of course, we all struggle with it. We wonder what in the world we're doing with our lives; what on earth we're really here for. At least, I hope we do. I hope that we get real with ourselves from time to time, and search deeply and ask these hard questions.

Because when we do; when we search the depths of our soul, and listen, we'll hear the same thing that God has told his people throughout the ages, the very words that God repeats throughout the scriptures, "I chose you."

Saints, each of you has been chosen to bear the fruit of God's love in this world, and to bear it in your own unique way.

And what a time to bear this fruit. What an important time for us, as God's chosen, to bear the fruit of God's love in this world. Things are rapidly changing around the world. Times are getting harder. There're economic challenges, there's political division, a rise in mental health issues and violence, and waning hope for what the future holds.

Do you remember Esther? The young Jewish girl who was chosen by God to save God's chosen people from being killed by the Persian king? She marries the king and becomes the queen. Why? In her cousin Mordecai's words, "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

You and I have been chosen by Jesus, to be his disciples, for just such a time as this. Our world needs healing. Our world needs hope. Our world needs to be reminded of God's love for us all. It's just at such a time as this, that the world needs to hear this from us.

If ever there was a time for the church to be the church, it's now. And we are the church; the holy people of God. We are the ones whom, for his reasons, God has chosen for this task. We are God's surprising choices to accomplish his unexpected task, of bringing healing and hope to our confused world.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit." Saints, you've been chosen by the One who is Love to be love and light in this dark world.

May God bless you and help you to bring the light of Jesus into our world, and to bear the fruit of his love. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.