

To Be Chosen

Ephesians 1:3-14
July 7, 2024

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Writing in the Upper Room Daily Devotional, Jessie Schut of Alberta told about her Children's Message one Sunday on the theme of being chosen.¹ She had invited members of the congregation to help her act out Jesus calling the disciples.

She began telling the story, saying, "Jesus called out, 'Matthew, will you come and follow me?'" Slowly, sheepishly, a teen came forward, mumbling, "Yes, Jesus, I will follow you."

One after another, "disciples" came forward as she called them, each showing more stage fright than enthusiasm. Jessie's heart sank. This wasn't what she'd hoped for.

Finally, she called out, saying, "Peter, Jesus is calling, 'Will you come and follow me?'" John, the young man playing Peter, exploded from the pew, his face radiating joy and excitement.

"Yes, yes!" he shouted as he danced up the aisle. "Yes, Jesus, I will, I will! I will follow you." He eagerly embraced Jessie and the other disciples, delighted to have been chosen by Jesus for this great privilege.

They all fell silent. John is a member of Friendship Group, a ministry for people with mental impairments. John may never be able to do all that some of us can, but that day he became God's messenger, showing us how to express the joy of being chosen by God.

In Today's New Testament lesson, the Apostle Paul is writing about the joy of being chosen by God. He's writing to the Ephesians, who were Gentiles; their lives had not been shaped by the Jewish laws and experience.

Unlike Paul and the other Jewish converts to Christianity, these were outsiders who had no claim to the religion rising up around them through Jesus, who himself was a Jewish healer and rabbi. What hope did they have when it came to the blessings of the Lord?

¹ From the July 7, 2007, e-mail edition of Upper Room Daily Devotional, by Jessie Schut of Alberta.

Today, we count ourselves blessed to be among God's chosen, those who as Paul says, have "... heard the word of truth, the gospel of ... salvation, and ... believed in (Jesus)...." Yes, we are blessed.

But what about those who have not heard and believed? We all have people in our lives who do not embrace faith in Jesus Christ as all that important – not important enough to include Sunday worship in their weekly plans, let alone selfless service as a way of serving the Lord.

Furthermore, many of us fall short when it comes to living out the faith we've inherited from those who have gone before. Can you imagine being an outsider when it comes to the blessing and the grace and the love of God? Can you imagine having the Letter to the Ephesians sent to you, listening to someone read it for the first time – to you?

I mean, Paul begins his letter to these Ephesian Gentiles saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed *us* ... just as he chose *us* (and) destined *us* for adoption as his children...."

When Paul talks about those who have been chosen and blessed, he's talking about himself and the other Apostles, the other Jewish Christians, who were "the first," as he says, "to set (their) hope on Christ."

But then he says this: "In (Christ) you also, when you had heard ... and ... believed, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit...."

Paul is taking what was freely given to the faithful of Israel and extending it to those outside the faith, those in need of God's presence in their lives. In doing that, Paul makes clear exactly what it means to be a follower of Christ. He gives us inspiration in our calling to reach out to those who need to feel and know God's love, study and follow the teachings of Jesus.

First, he says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, or gift. The Prophet Isaiah lists the gifts of the Spirit as wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (11:1-2)

This means that we as follower of Christ have been given access to divine wisdom and understanding in making decisions, God's counsel and strength in battling life's difficulties, an inner sense of knowing and respecting the Lord in our day-to-day lives.

Not only that, but when we fail to live up to the blessings and gifts of the Spirit, we have the grace of the Lord to carry us forward. As Paul says, in Christ "we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.”

If God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing and lavished upon us the grace of forgiveness and acceptance, shouldn't we share this with those who need it most?

Too often, though, all our busyness amid this complicated and difficult world causes us to forget who we are as children of God; we forget that God is counting on us to step up and make a positive difference.

It's like the little boy in Bible class during the lesson on God and the Israelites. “Mr. Goldblatt,” he said. “There's something I can't figure out.” “What's that, Joey?”

“Well, according to the Bible, the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?”
“Right,” said Goldblatt.

“And the children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?” “Ah, yeah - right.”

“And the children of Israel built the temple, right?”

“You've learned your lesson well,” said Goldblatt.

“And the children of Israel fought the Egyptians, and the children of Israel fought the Romans, and the children of Israel were always doing something important, right?”

“All that is right,” said Goldblatt. “So what's your question?”

“What I want to know is this,” said Joey. “What were all the grownups doing?”

What were all the grownups doing? When it comes to making a positive difference in this world, when it comes to the spiritual gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and inner strength, knowing the Lord and respecting God, what are all the grownups doing these days? It's a good question.

The last thing we want people wondering about us is what we were doing when all the grownups were acting like children.

Look, we've been entrusted with keeping the faith and sharing it with others. Paul calls this “the pledge of our inheritance,” the pledge we make as those who believe in Christ and accept our calling as faithful disciples.

This means that we are the ones whom God is counting on to be the grownups. God is looking to you and me to take our faith seriously, and to wake up every day trying to make the world a better place, one decision and encounter at a time. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Listening God, caring Parent, out of the fullness of our hearts, we pour out our prayers to you. In this weekend of celebration, as we mark the birth of our nation, we discover that we are brimming with gratitude: for the grace to stand tall, to reach to the heavens; for the ability to move one foot in front of the other, to feel life surging in our veins; for the blessings of taste and smell, the fragrance of a rose, the smell of fresh bread, the taste of a summer peach, the flavor of strawberry shortcake.

O Source of our energy, our strength and our life, we are grateful for the simple experiences of the ordinary, which come to us out of your bountiful provision. In the fullness of our hearts, we lift up our thanks.

Out of the passion in our souls, we ask you for courage to leave behind our addictions and temptations, for wisdom to discern your will for our lives, for grace to share your spirit of love and acceptance, for faith to receive your healing. Send your Spirit of joy upon those celebrating high moments in life.

We pray all this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who taught us the Lord's Prayer that we lift up in song this morning, singing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**