

"I have chosen you"

Sermon by Bob Kuntz

John 15:4-17 5-20-07

Suppose some Sunday, Jesus came and stood in our midst. If we handed him the Bible, what Scripture would he read to us? Which of his words, that he spoke to the crowds and disciples, would he speak to us?

Beloved, we are more than two or three, gathered here in Jesus' name. Christ himself IS with us. I believe his words in the gospel of John, chapter 15, ARE words directly and specifically to us: **You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will abide...**

Long before we chose Jesus, he chose us. He gave us family and friends and those experiences that called us into faith. For me, that was seeing the faith of my grandparents, growing up at Calvary EUB church in Akron, going to Camp Wanake, and being in Confirmation Class.

Beloved, these are Christ's words to us: **You did not choose me but I chose you.** Like Jeremiah, we often say, "Lord, I'm just a teenager. I'm too young." Like Moses, we sometimes say, "Lord, I can't speak or pray in front of others." Like Peter we may say, "Lord, you should never choose me. I'm a sinful man."

Yet Jesus chooses us. Why? Because he knows our hearts. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He's not choosing us because we are heroes. He knows we have flaws and faults. He chooses us because he loves us. He chooses us because he sees his love in us. And he chooses us because he trusts the Holy Spirit to give us the power and strength to bear fruit.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will abide... Jesus calls us, flawed and limited as we are, to help build the Kingdom of Heaven. He sends us out into that world – where there is great pain and darkness, where people are lost and suffering. He is counting on us to be light, to be his word, to take his forgiveness, to tell his good news, to bring hope, to open a door so people can touch God.

When we have a broken relationship in our family, when we meet a person in despair, when a need in the world tugs at us, Jesus is choosing us to bear fruit. He's given us the letter. We're the mail carrier. He sends us to people who need his message.

How do we deliver his message? ¹² **This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** ¹³ **No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.** We deliver his message by loving others, by being patient and kind, by our generosity and giving, by our helpfulness and service. Not by judging, berating, pressuring, hassling, guilt-tripping. We deliver his message by looking at others with the great love and forgiveness of Christ.

But the Good News is more than this. Yes, Jesus chooses us. Yes, the Lord speaks to us and calls us to do his work. This is not the end of what the Lord does. He also gives us his power, strength, wisdom, and hope to help us fulfill our calling. As Jesus tells the disciples in verse 5: "**...apart from me you can do nothing.**"

Jesus is not saying that we can't butter our bread without him. He's saying that we cannot touch lives for God without him. We cannot be a part of what God is doing on earth without him. His forgiveness, his presence, his strength and spirit make it possible for us to bear fruit. Nothing of eternal worth, nothing of heavenly power, nothing of spiritual healing, no change of heart or comfort for grief happens without him.

If we want to understand our kids, our spouse, our co-workers, we need Jesus. If we want to understand ourselves, the ways we are blind and what we have to offer others, we need Jesus. If we want to know what will keep us from getting burned out, we need Jesus. If we want to know how our talents and passions can be used to help others, we need Jesus. He wants us to be effective in the world, to make a difference. So after he chooses us and calls us, he gives us what we need to touch others with the peace and power of God.

Perhaps you can think of someone who has done this in your life – a teacher or coach, a co-worker or employer, a family member or neighbor – someone who showed you something of God, someone who taught you something deep and true, someone who made a difference in your life. Perhaps you know someone whose patience you admire, someone who is generous and helpful, someone who doesn't panic but faces life calmly and unafraid. Perhaps you know someone who carries about them the light of God, or the peace of heaven, or the joy of the Spirit.

We can see it in others: that they bear fruit because they abide in Christ and Christ abides in them. Other people forgive us, teach us, help us heal and grow. And we see we have received more than what *they* gave. It's not just that person loving us, it's Jesus loving us through that person.

Beloved, we see this happens in others. Can we trust that this will happen in us too? Jesus loves you. His power and Spirit are working in you, bearing light in you, loving others through you. Let us trust him and open our hearts and yield to his will. We cannot bring about that fruit, but abiding in Christ, we will see him bring forth great change and healing in our world.