

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 18 June 2023**  
**Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 11**

**1st Reading: *Exodus 19:2-8a***

**Psalm: 100**

**2nd Reading: *Romans 5:1-8***

**Gospel: *Matthew 9:35—10:23***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

In the name of the Father, ☩ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Red Rover, Red Rover, send Peter on over.

Did you ever play that game in school? Two teams line up and then one team calls for a player on the other team to “come over” while they all hold hands to try to keep him from breaking through the line. If he breaks through, he goes back to his original team, but if he doesn’t, then he joins the team who called him over. And you keep doing this until all the players end up on one team. And you usually want to call over the stronger players so that they will make a stronger line for the next time.

We used to play it when I was growing up in what we called “Phys Ed” class, “Physical Education” or PE, or “Phy Ed” or at some schools it was just called “Gym” class. But before you started playing the game, you first had to choose the two teams. And it wasn’t just for Red Rover. In our school, we would play baseball or softball, or touch football, or any number of other games. And it always started with two people the teacher had picked to be the team captains that day.

The two captains would take turns picking one person to be on their team. And, of course, they always picked the best athletes first. Now, with my particular lack of athletic prowess, I was almost always one of the last to be chosen, unless we were playing touch football, because I was actually pretty good as a quarterback - at least compared to the other boys in our very small school.

Well, I remember watching one of the films made in the 1960s about the life of Jesus. My daughter Rachel was watching it with me. I don't remember which one it was, and I don't want to criticise the wrong film, but in whichever film it was that we were watching, it came to the point in the story that we read in today's Gospel when Jesus chose his twelve apostles. And Rachel and I started looking at each other, then we started shaking our heads, and then we just started laughing, because in this particular film, whichever one it was, they had Jesus facing the group of potential disciples, and then he would call out the name of one of the disciples he had chosen. And that disciple would raise his arms and cheer and come running over to Jesus' side, and jump up and down because he had been chosen to join Jesus' team. And then we would see the faces of the rest of the group, each one hoping that he would be next to be chosen. "Red Rover, Red Rover, send Judas on over."

You will excuse me if I thought that this depiction of Jesus choosing his twelve apostles was a bit ridiculous. But do we sometimes feel like that in our lives? Why won't God choose me? Aren't I good enough? This other person always seems to be blessed, and everything always goes well for them. God seems to have chosen them and blessed them, and they're so much better than I am.

Or maybe we have the opposite reaction. If you listened carefully to our readings this morning, you might have noticed that being chosen by God doesn't always lead to wonderful blessings: Paul writes that "we...boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,<sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope". And Jesus warns his chosen disciples that "they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues;<sup>18</sup>and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me.... Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death;<sup>22</sup>and you will be hated by all because of my name."

Perhaps we feel like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*: "I know, I know. We are Your chosen people. But, once in a while, can't You choose someone else?"

Yes, being chosen by God is serious business, and is hardly like being chosen to be on a sport's team. It is the most wonderful blessing we could possibly hope for. And we are not chosen based on our own merits, but based on God's grace. Yet there are also consequences of being chosen. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's terms, we Christians do not peddle "cheap grace", but "costly grace". It cost Jesus everything to save us, and it may cost us the same. It cost Bonhoeffer *his* own life when he was executed by the Nazis for his Christian faith.

In our reading from Exodus we hear how God chose the entire People of Israel to be his own people. God tells them: "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup>but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." And what is the response of the people of Israel to God? "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." And this passage then leads into God giving the people the Ten Commandments, and then all the instructions in the Torah about how the People of Israel were to live as God's chosen people.

And then in our reading from Romans, Paul tells us how we have all become God's chosen people through the sacrifice of Jesus: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." And so through our baptism into Christ, we have become his - all of us, called to be his people.

But we are not all called to be exactly the same, or do exactly the same things. We have been thanking God since Pentecost for the individual ways that he has called us, and for the individual gifts the Holy Spirit has given each of us.

So the twelve apostles, selected by Jesus for a very specific ministry, were not the elite superstar "Jesus Team" while everybody else had to just sit back and cheer them on. Every one of Jesus' disciples, and we read that he had at least 70 of them, were chosen. We read Jesus' instructions to all of them - indeed, to all of us - in the Sermon on the Mount: Love God with all your heart. Trust him and do not worry. Love one another.

The instructions Jesus gives his twelve apostles today, sent on a very specific mission, are the same. Depend on God and trust him for everything. So Jesus calls all of us to do the same, but he calls each one of us by name, and calls each one of us to our own specific calling, whether that is to be a farmer, a mother, a teacher, a friend, a quilter.

The past two days, Wayne, Dale and I attended the Synod Assembly, and the main theme of this year's Assembly was to "be the body" of Christ. And we spent several hours Friday afternoon exploring and thinking about the ways in which we each felt the individual call from God to serve Christ in our lives, to be open to hear the voice of God and the stirring of the Holy Spirit, and how each of our individual callings work together within the Church, the Body of Christ, to serve God and the world. And this is something I hope we will be able to explore together even more in the days ahead.

So when we read in today's Gospel how Jesus chose his twelve apostles, gave them a specific mission to preach the Gospel, and told them to trust God as they went about that mission, know that God has chosen each one of us, each one of you, given each of you your own mission, each just as valuable as the next, and has promised that the Holy Spirit will be with you as you live out your calling. All you need to do is be who you are meant to be, believe in Jesus, love God and others, and trust God as you live out your life. In the words of our Psalm today:

<sup>2</sup>Serve the LORD with gladness... our maker to whom we belong;  
we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture.

<sup>5</sup>Good indeed is the LORD, whose steadfast love is everlasting,  
whose faithfulness endures from age to age."

Amen!

*Copyright © 2023 - Thomas J. Mosbø*