

"The Chosen"
Deuteronomy 7:6-9

July 30, 2017

8th Sunday After Pentecost

"Choice" is a very important concept for many people in America today. Some have even made it into a constitutional right for some activities – a secular sacrament, if you will. Many people believe that we have the power and the right to choose for ourselves everything that we want or need – from trivial things, like whether we want fries or tots with our burger, to more important things in life, like where we want to go to school, who we want to marry, and what career we want to have.

How do we decide what to choose? What criteria influence our choices? I would suggest that we employ two criteria whenever we have to make a choice. One, we make choices based on the quality of what we are choosing. We want to choose the very best items, not inferior or worthless things. Second, we want to make a choice based on how that which we choose will benefit us. In other words, how will what I choose help and serve me? While these criteria may help us make choices in everyday life, they fail to help us explain choice with God: how God choose and how His choices affect us.

The first thing to consider in the matter of choice between God and us is, "Who chooses who?" In this matter, American culture has influenced American Christianity. We live in a culture in which people are taught from early on that they have the power to do whatever they desire if they just try hard enough and believe in themselves. American Christianity picks up on this and says that you have the power to choose God if you just try hard enough and believe in yourself. And, having chosen God, He will bless you for that.

The Word of God teaches differently. The Word of God says that, by nature, each of us is dead in our trespasses and sin. Dead people can make no choices. They are unable to choose him The Word of God also says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God." (Romans 8:7) Minds hostile to God will not choose God. They are not interested in Him. Anyone who is waiting for themselves or family members and friends to choose God, that will never happen.

As good Lutherans, I would expect you to know this and not fall for it, even with great pressure being exerted on you by American Evangelicalism. This is simply not an issue for you. It was not an issue for the nation of Israel in our text for today. None of them thought that they had "chosen God". They, like us, knew that God had chosen them. The question for them then became why did God choose them. The question for us also becomes why did God choose us?

We probably think that God chooses people in the same way that we choose other things. First, God chooses quality. In other words, He chooses those people who are better than other people. Second, God chooses benefit. In other words, He chooses those people who can best serve Him.

Israel thought there was something special about them which made God choose them to be His people. In our text, when Moses said, "For you are a people holy to the

Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth,” they probably thought, “Treasured possession? We must be really good for God to treasure us.” They thought of how they built the tabernacle, worshiped God, and made the proper sacrifices. They remembered how God had freed them from slavery in Egypt, led them across the Red Sea, defeated their enemies, and so on. “We must be really special,” they thought. Of course, they conveniently forgot about their complaining, their lack of faith, and their rebellion.

We tend to behave like the people of Israel did. We believe that we did not choose God, but God chose us. We think about how we built this church, worship the Lord here, do all the right religious things, including bringing our monetary gifts to support this church. And we remember how God has blessed us. Perhaps, He has not done a spectacular and miraculous things as he did for the people of Israel, but He has blessed us with all that we need to support this life – money, food, clothes, shelter, and so on. He is also provided us with all that we need to support our spiritual life – this place of worship, pastors, the Word of God, the Sacraments, and so on. We connect the dots just as the people of Israel did. God has chosen us and blessed us because we were good (or at least, we were less bad than others) and because we have done good.

When we believe this, we begin having an “attitude”. The people of Israel demonstrated this attitude of superiority in their dealings with Gentiles. The Israelites acted as if they were better than others simply because they were Israelites and God had chosen them. They considered all Gentiles inferior simply because they were Gentiles and God had not chosen them.

We may display such an attitude with unbelievers. We may think, speak, and act as if we are superior to unbelievers simply because we are Christians and God has chosen us. We may look down upon, criticize, or avoid unbelievers because they are unbelievers and God has not chosen them.

The truth about choice in the holy Scriptures is much more difficult for us to understand. It doesn't make sense. Us choosing God makes sense. We are used to choosing what we want. God choosing us because we are better than other people or can do more to serve God makes sense. We are use to being chosen for a sports team, for a part in a play, for a job, or anything else because we are better than and can do a better job than the people not chosen for these things.

God did not choose us because of our quality or because of our skill in serving. Not only are we sinful by nature and by action, but there are others who are bigger in body, better in morals, stronger in power, and smarter in mind than us. Moses said as much about the people of Israel in our text. In talking about why God had chosen Israel for his treasured possession, Moses said, “it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.”

The Lord chose us, not because of anything in us or anything we could do for Him, but only because of what is in Him and what He could do for us. The Lord chose

you and me out of grace. Grace is the undeserved love which only the Lord has. Too often, what we call “love” is tainted by self-interest. We love for a reason. We love people because they are kind and nice to us and love us back. The Lord loves for no reason. He not only loves those who are unkind and not nice, but He loves those people who hate Him and rebel against Him. In contrasting our love for the worthy with God’s love for the unworthy, the Word of God says, “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:7-8)

You are the treasured possession of God, not by your merit or worth, but solely by the choice of God. You are a people holy to the Lord, not by your goodness or righteousness, but solely by the goodness and righteousness of Jesus Christ. God has given you the goodness and righteousness of Christ and declared you good and right before him. God has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus’ death on the cross as the payment for your sin. As the Lord redeemed Israel (that is, paid the price to free them) “from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt,” so has Jesus redeemed you from slavery to sin and from the control of Satan.

Not only has the Lord loved you, chosen you, forgiven you, declared you to be holy, and redeemed you from slavery to sin, death, and Satan, He has established His covenant – His promise – with you in Holy Baptism. This may not seem to be a big deal. After all, the love we have often cools and the promises we make are often broken (as evidenced by the many marriages which fail in our country). But God is different. He not only chose us before the world began and loved us up until the present day, but He establishes His covenant – His promise – that he will not sometime unchoose us or stop loving us in the future. He will continue to have us as His treasured possession and will always love us, no matter what happens. As for God’s love, St. Paul correctly affirms in our epistle lesson for today, “for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38 – 39) As for God’s covenant – His promise, Moses correctly affirms in our text for today, “know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” Having God choose us impacts our lives in many important ways. First of all, God choosing us relieves us of the pressure of we choosing Him. Many people stress out over whether they have truly chosen God or not. Grace relieves stress. God has chosen us. That ends all worry or fear.

Second, God choosing us does away with all pride and feeling of superiority in who we are as the people of God and how we became the people of God. We approach our life with God and with His people always with the greatest humility because we know God chose us and did everything necessary for us to become the people of God. We have no reason to boast or take credit for even the smallest aspect of our salvation. We have no right to feel superior to any unbeliever or even any inactive believer. Apart from God’s choosing and grace we would be just like them.

Third, God choosing us does away with our fear and worry. He has chosen us to be in relation to him and has made a covenant with us to that effect. He is faithful to His covenant and His promises are reliable. We live in confidence now, not fear, because He has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us. We live in hope for the future, not worry, because He will never break His promise of everlasting life to us.

Although choosing is a big deal in politics and society, let us choose not to worry about choosing here within the church. As much as we like to choose in matters of spirituality, our choices are often not reliable or permanent. God, on the other hand, has chosen us by His grace which is very reliable and has established a covenant with us through the blood of Jesus, a covenant full of God's promises for the future which are permanent and will never be changed. Therefore, the best choice is not the one made by us but for us. Amen