

Being Chosen
Menno Mennonite Church
February 27, 2022

Purpose: To explore the meaning of being chosen for the work of being a disciple.

Message: We are chosen by Christ to carry out the work of the kingdom.

Scripture: Luke 9:28-38 (I will read); Exodus 34:29-35

Synopsis: There is something about being chosen that makes one feel special. We can remember being chosen. We can remember being overlooked, even for something mundane. But being chosen to be part of God's movement in the world that is something special.

Say what you will about the transfiguration, it is one of those elements that are hard to know what to make of it. It is this supernatural incident which places Jesus in rarified company. But why? To underscore Jesus' credentials? That was hardly needed at this point. To reiterate the blessing of the baptism that started it all? Again, something that has proved well confirmed since.

The less obvious possibility is that it was about confirming for his audience, the disciples, precisely what they have been chosen for: to be part of the lineage of God's work in the world. They were chosen then to be part of something much larger than themselves, larger than they could possibly imagine, a task that they would soon take up. They were not ready then, perhaps, but soon they would carry forward the declaration of the kingdom already here. We are chosen, and in being chosen, we carry forward this message too.

Luke 9:28–36

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings
Jesus took with him
Peter and John and James,
and went up on the mountain to pray.

²⁹ And while he was praying,
the appearance of his face changed,
and his clothes became dazzling white.

³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men,

Moses and Elijah, talking to him.

³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure,
which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep;
but since they had stayed awake,
they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus,

“Master, it is good for us to be here;
let us make three dwellings,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”
—not knowing what he said.

³⁴ While he was saying this,
a cloud came and overshadowed them;
and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said,

“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

And they kept silent and in those days
told no one any of the things they had seen.

I think we can all remember being chosen. Or perhaps not being chosen. Either way the notion of who-is-in and who-is-out has a way of echoing well past the playground and into our lives. These are seminal moments. The pride of going first. The awkward glances as you wait for the final selections to be made. Being chosen means seen, acknowledged, and wanted. You are on the team and desired for it. Sometimes, of course, there is the sigh of relief. There is the other side of the coin in being chosen. The duty that falls to us because someone has to do it. Calling the number for jury duty the evening prior as I did the other day and hearing that the demand had been lifted is no small thing. Or the ubiquitous war movie trope of who draws the short straw to take on the impossible mission. Spoiler: it is most often the last one to draw, and the one to whom we as an audience is most invested. Either way, there is something weighty and important to the moment of status and precedent we are given when we are chosen.

The Bible, of course, is full of the chosen. The favored ones; the chosen people, the special prophets, the famous speakers and doers of the text who come to the fore in God's story and become the heroes. In case you are wondering, it seems like being chosen to be on Team YHWH falls more in the straw-drawing category than the excited cry of "O-o-o pick me!". The people who are chosen to carry the work of God in the world almost always receive this news with at least some level of trepidation, or at least a few good excuses of why this simply is not a good time to be serving the Lord. Think Moses and his stammer, Isaiah and his unclean lips, Jonah and his cruise. The list goes on. I would include myself in that long list. Landing here to do this job with you, and more broadly over the last 16 years had a whole lot more to do with me bargaining with God as to why this is a realistically bad idea for any number of reasons, and a risk I was not sure if I wanted to take on than it was any confident swagger on my part. I don't mind saying I still have moments where I still find myself somewhat surprised to be called to serve in this way. Perhaps you are the same. Yet, gratefully, here we are, and here we remain.

For we are all chosen on some level or not. As much significance as we place on the action of choosing to follow Jesus, as well we should, there is also an element that we don't always speak to, largely because we don't know how. That is that we are chosen by God, by Jesus to be part of the following. To be sure, it is the will of God and the hope of the Kingdom that all people will come to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, but that does not lessen the meaning nor the reality that God chooses to invite us into following, as the creeds would say, while we

were still sinners (in the hopeful optimism that baptism might cure us of that state). God chooses to come and reach out. Christ chooses to invite the disciples to come and follow after, knowing that they in time would carry the message well into the world. God chooses us, the church, to redeem the beloved creation into that which it was called to be. Being chosen aligns with purpose. The biblical narrative demonstrates time and again that those who are chosen, be they an individual, a community, or whole nations are given a role to play within the narrative of God. Being chosen identifies purpose to which they are called, a role that they play, and a purpose they are empowered to fulfill.

When Jesus chooses Peter John and James to accompany him onto the mountain of transfiguration, we can almost see the gloating on their faces as they head up the trail. Whether they knew it or not, they were being called out and chosen among the chosen, which is always a big deal. But among the things that has never really made sense to me in this experience, and to be sure, they are numerous and abundant, is the invective to not speak of this to anyone at the end of the hike. Usually that alone is enough to spill the beans at least partially. What's the adage: the probability of a secret being spilled is equal to the square of those who know plus the cube of its level of secrecy? They go up the mountain and see that which is beyond their imagination, and they opt to say nothing whatsoever, and collectively write it off as a bad dream? That doesn't quite seem to hold with human nature as I know it. Even just the awkward "you'll never believe what happened to us" sort of conversation that happens just to make sure that you haven't completely lost it seems all but mandatory. So, what would keep them holding this secret so closely?

Often it is said that this event was about confirming, again, the status of Jesus as the coming of God. While that is indeed true on the basic evidence here, this purpose by itself does not account for the secrecy—frankly the opposite is true. Why not shout that as widely as possible? Equally, if this was for the benefit of the disciples to place Christ in the Spiritual hierarchy of Judaism, they might of 1) stayed awake 2) had more than a fleeting glimpse, as Luke would have it of the greats as they departed. And again; why not talk about it?

I have begun to wonder whether we are getting the wrong end of the equation when we focus so keenly on "what does this say about Jesus?" and not at consider what it means about the disciples, and by extension, us. What if it was never a commentary about Jesus and where he

fits, but really a matter of confirming the choosing of the disciples for carrying forth the baton of the Kingdom that Jesus was about to hand them? Perhaps the whole purpose of this visitation was to allow the disciples, and these disciples in particular, to see their vocation in light of Moses, Elijah and Jesus as a continuation of what they were called to do and called to be? Like the prophets and leaders before them, they are chosen for purposes far beyond them, as we each are. They will know challenge and discouragement. They will be met with outright hostility and hatred. They will see both the end of their very hopes in Jesus to be followed by the spark of new beginning, and they will in turn that spark into the flame which the Spirit will carry on throughout the world. Perhaps the whole point of this outing, beyond the regular need to step away and refresh, was to place the work of discipleship into the context of being the chosen of God, just as all of these were and are chosen so that they would have something to hold onto when the time came for them to pick up the race and run alongside. Perhaps this was a glimpse of where the Kingdom actually fits, and how it will, in time, work. That would be something to carry close, and keep quiet, because not everyone is ready to hear from the burning bush or to look on the face the divine. We are not always sure if the mantle is ours to pickup, let alone carry, let alone let that mantle shape us and move us. This is something that will demand much, calls deeply, and take them to places they can only dream about. And it takes us there too.

We often make our discipleship mainly about our ability to get the task right, to live by the right rules, say the right things and all the rest. We need look no further than this hall of fame to have this notion squashed. Moses declines the spotlight. Isaiah actively runs from the will of God suffering a panic attack. Peter recklessly denies his acquaintance with Jesus when the going gets tough. James and John argue over prestige and power. But still, they are chosen. They are called, they are used to being about the kingdom that they were invited to be a part of and given this teaser taste of in the here and now. They are chosen and they are used in mighty ways from that time to this day forward.

As we have looked at the world of late, this week especially, there may be a temptation to think that the work of the Kingdom remains a long way off. Being people who want desperately to be effective—to make the difference, to stop the war, to heal the wounds, to make it all go away and now—moments where the distance between what is and what will be within the way of God can feel impossibly far off. We do not know what to say, what to do, where to be. We are

simultaneously close to that which is happening within our continuously streamed bubbles, yet ironically as distant as always as we offer thoughts, prayers, and little else. We deplore the violence yet remain uncertain what to do within it.

I think it appropriate in times like these to say as clearly as we can to ourselves as well as to our world this simple, essential truth: this is not the will of God. Conflict will not bring peace, warfare will ever break and not build up, no matter who started it. What's more, this will not be the fate, ultimately, of history. For the Lord God almighty has spoken it. We are chosen not because we are effective in strategically bringing heaven into Earth, though we ought never stop trying. We are chosen to be part of what God is doing in the world and through the world because God is faithful to the world. Our job as disciples is to recognize our status, our chosen identity does not provide us with insulation from what is, but rather calls us to faithfully declare the way and will of the one who holds all of history, no matter the season or the hour. Even in the midst of our frustrations we are invited to know that it is God who holds all, knows all, and will bring all to fullness come what may.

For our identity was never meant to be known solely on the lonely mountain top, but to be lived among the difficult reality of the world as it is, come what may. This is our identity, our call, our chosen vocation because we are continuing what God has had in mind from the very first. It is God's grace that will see this grow and come to flower, even to the ends of the age. For God works through us, come what may.