

God Picked You!

John 15:15-16

Friends have you ever picked a winner? I mean have you ever watched a competition like American Idol and early on in the auditioning process you were so impressed by a performer you thought this person is going to be the next Idol – and they ended up winning...

And maybe you had enough confidence in your pick to say something to your friends about it – that person is going to win it... and when they did, what happens?

You get to say “I called it, Didn’t I say they were going to win, I told you so...”

You get the satisfaction of having bragging rights.

Or maybe you’re a sports fan and you’ve got your favorite picks on who will win the Masters, the World Series, the Grey Cup, the Superbowl, or the Stanley Cup this season.

Maybe you’ve even got a little something more than bragging rights riding on it... some people like to bet on the teams

they’ve picked to win and make a little money, and if the odds are against them... and they still win, well they can make a lot of money.

Now there are many reasons why people will pick one team over another, most of them have to do with looking at the skill level of a team and their performance in terms of wins and losses.

But sometimes... people make a pick because they see potential, because they see something that a team is capable of and they believe they will be able to do it...

And that is of course the essence of any good horse racing story – that someone, be it a jockey or a trainer or an owner – whoever... sees potential or believes there is potential in a horse that no one else wants and decides to invest in that horse.

And after some training and a few set backs they enter the horse in the big race and what do you know... against all the odds that horse wins!

That's the story of Pharlap, Hildalgo, Seabiscuit, Secretariat

And the person who saw the potential in that horse reaps the rewards and benefits, the fame and fortune and so on....

All because they made a good pick.

And friends I have to tell you that for a young man in Jesus' day picking a Rabbi to study and train with was like picking which horse you were going to bet on.

Because as a Rabbi grew in status and reputation as a wise, insightful teacher of the Law they would gain respect and recognition – so would his students, their disciples.

And if you eventually wanted to become a Rabbi yourself... it was a great advantage if your mentor happened to be a great Rabbi – you were already set-up for success. You had the right credentials.

Other's would pick you and follow you.

And if you happened to pick a successful Rabbi early on in his career before He was popular, if you were one of his original disciples, well that only increased your prestige.

That you recognized the potential for greatness in him before others did, that you joined him early on, this would speak volumes about your own abilities and knowledge.

You weren't someone who had jumped on the bandwagon because of recent popularity, like the crowds of people did when Jesus arrived at Jerusalem for the Passover celebration riding into the city on a donkey.

Because that's what had just happened a few days before Jesus spoke the words we read in our scripture passage this morning.

And I can imagine that as the disciples watched the citizens of Jerusalem – the most important city in Israel - crowding alongside the road, covering the road with their cloaks and palm branches, cheering wildly and shouting Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel...

I can imagine that the disciples were thinking to themselves – hey, we made a good pick!

But then as they are sitting in the upper room eating their Passover meal a few days later – that famous last supper, Jesus tells them – You did not pick me... I picked you! and I appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last

And Jesus says this to his disciples not so much because their heads are puffed up with pride and they need to be taken down a few notches – he’s just finished telling them he calls them his friends because he’s let them in on God’s plan for salvation...

He tells them this because with all that is going to happen to them in the near future as Jesus is arrested, tried and executed...

They will need something to hang on to as everything they’ve hoped for by following Jesus seems to fall apart around them and they are tempted to fall away and give up on following Him.

Or better yet, they will need to know that someone is hanging on to them as everything falls apart. That they are a part of this not because they chose it - but because someone chose them, and that someone has determined there will be a future for them, and a productive lasting one at that, as followers of Jesus – in spite of how everything will seem to fall apart.

Because in reality it wasn’t the disciples who saw potential in Jesus – it was Jesus who knew what He was going to make the disciples into and He wasn’t going to let them quit before He was finished with them.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last.”

I don’t think these words were at the forefront of the disciples’ minds in the midst of all that turmoil later that evening – but years later as they wrote the gospels they must have marveled, and thanked Jesus for persevering in his choosing them when they reflected back upon their actions that night.

How they struggled to stay awake and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane

How they fled at Jesus subsequent arrest when he was betrayed by Judas.

How Peter, in spite of his insistence that he would never deny Jesus, did so three times!

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit...”

Friends we need to hear Jesus saying this to us as well...

Because if we are the ones who picked Jesus, if that relationship started from our understanding, our desire, our determination, with our choice...

then when we struggle to stay awake like the disciples did – meaning when we struggle to keep our relationship with Jesus vibrant in the midst of the competing demands of life on our time and energies... and we can't – we when fall asleep so to speak...

when we betray Jesus by putting our loyalties elsewhere, when our actions and lifestyle proclaim He isn't really the **Lord** of our life...

when we are afraid of the consequences of being identified as His follower and we deny that we know Jesus...

then it means that there the desire, the determination, the understanding we had to begin this relationship with Jesus wasn't strong enough, isn't deep enough, and its not big enough to endure the trials of life and it won't last until the end.

But if its true – and I believe it is because Jesus says it – that we did not choose him, but He chose us...

This proves God loves us with an unconditional love which nothing can ever undo.

The Apostle Paul explains “why” in Romans 5:8 where he says *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

God loved us when we were at our worst, Christ chose us when we were full on sinners – that means that all the screw-ups and set-backs that we experience as Christ’s followers won’t put an end to His work in our lives, it only reveals our on-going need for more of it.

And we have his assurance that He will continue... because He said that **HE** chose us. Amen?

Now friends – there is another side to Jesus’ statement that we need to hear this morning as well.

We need to hear which personal pronouns He is using to address us.

If our friends in Texas were to translate the personal pronouns from the original Greek accurately you would hear Jesus say – Y’all did not choose me... but I chose you... and appointed y’all to go and bear fruit...

So In other words Jesus is telling us as a group – as a church, that our composition isn’t just a haphazard collection whoever shows up and feels like sticking around for whatever reasons.

- Y’all did not choose me

And even though it might look and feel like we’re just a random group...the truth is Jesus has personally selected everyone who is connected Valleyview – to be his followers.

- But I chose you

And then Jesus switches back from the individual to the plural

- I appointed y’all to go and bear fruit...

As if to say... that it’s not until you understand that I chose you that you can truly become a group – my body.

As if to say...Unless you understand in your hearts that **I chose** you, you will never be more than just a group of individuals.

And friends a group of individuals will not accomplish anything – that’s like herding cats...

It's only as we understand and truly believe that it's true that Christ chose us that we become His body which He has appointed to go and bear fruit.

Christ chose us to move us from being individuals to becoming His Body...

Are you understanding this? Do you realize the implications this has for us? Do you realize that it's not our choice?

This is what Christ has planned for us – our only choice is to be obedient, or disobedient...

Christ has chosen us to be together – and if we are going to be obedient to Christ's desires it means that we must gather...

We can't be His body unless we are gathered together.

Friends we're conditioned by our society to believe that what we believe in is our own personal private choice... and the church has gone along with that by saying that becoming a

follower of Jesus means that you have a "personal" relationship with Him.

And most of us think that means a "private" relationship.

But that's not what Jesus wanted for us – for his disciples...

This morning He contradicts what we've been conditioned to believe about what we believe and what we think it means to "go to church"

Y'all did not choose me, but I chose you – and I appointed y'all to go and bear fruit...

Friends its time that we start taking steps to become more and more obedient to Christ in this matter.

Its time that we decide we're going to be more intentional about gathering together as Valleyview...

Maybe that means you're going to decide make attending worship on Sunday's a regular priority – that instead of

attending only when you have time... you're going to make time...

Maybe it means that instead of leaving right away afterwards you're going to stick around for coffee and begin to get to know new people.

Maybe it means that you're going to join a Christ Care group this fall – where you will develop deeper Christian relationships that will support you in the ups and downs of life.

Maybe it means that you're going to take leadership in a ministry or do some work for the church and set an example for newcomers to see how “gathering together” is highly valued here at Valleyview.

And friends if the simple fact that doing these means we're obeying Christ isn't enough to motivate you – listen to a summary of Meg Hunter's reflections on what it means to really gather together...

She wrote these thoughts on her blog this past May 2012.

“small towns fill a need we all have: the need for community. We need the accountability of being missed when we skip Mass.

We need the accountability of being noticed when we're out two-timing our spouses. We need to know that what we do and say does not go unnoticed, that our sins hurt not only us but the body of Christ. Small towns sure as heck provide that.

We also need to know that we are needed, that we are known and loved, that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. We need to know that people care about us. Sure, it's hard when people get gossipy or judgmental, but that's the fault of fallen people, not of community.

I love living in a small town because it does for me what my parish rarely has: it provides community. I've found few Catholic churches that really feel like family; not the way Atchison (my town) does, anyway.”

There are a lot of reasons that Catholics leave the Church for various Protestant denominations: difficult Church teachings, bad Church music, and blah preaching are high on the list.

But I think a huge player in this game is the fact that Protestant churches are real communities. They're not just buildings where people happen to show up once a week.

In the best cases, they're the social center of the parishioners' lives. This is where you see your friends, where you met your wife, where you go for love and support.

For Catholics, not so much. Take this example: when I was 25, I spent half a year in a parish where I went to Mass every day. In a crowd of about 40, I was the only person between the ages of 7 and 45. I took my baby nephew with me every day. At the end of my time there, the priest still didn't know my name.

After this she concludes her blog by stating

"I guess I just feel as though my church ought to be more a place of fellowship than the clearance aisle at Walmart. Call me crazy."

Friends – we're better together, so we need to gather – lets pray.