

God Picked You!

John 12:12-19, John 15:15-16

Brothers and sisters have you ever picked a winner? If you are a sports fan you probably have your favorite picks for which team will win the World Series, the Grey Cup, the Superbowl, the Stanley Cup, the World Cup – or who won't win the World Juniors - again...

Now there are many reasons why people will pick one team over another, sometimes it's sentimental, sometimes it's because it's because you can see the obvious level of skill and accomplishment and a winning track record to back it up.

But sometimes... you will make a pick because you can see potential. At first glance your pick doesn't look like anything special, but you see beyond that. You can what that team is capable of and you 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 pick that horse and invest in racing that horse. And after some training and a few setbacks they enter 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.

Now brothers and sisters, what does this have to do with our scripture passage this morning? 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. Others 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 which 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 all that they've hoped for in picking Jesus as the one to follow seems to fall apart and they are tempted to give up and fall away.

Or better yet, they will need to know that someone is hanging on to them as everything falls apart around them.

They will need to know they are a part of all 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 – Apostles! 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.”*

Now, later that evening in the midst of all the events that occurred leading up to Jesus arrest, and later on through the good Friday and easter Sunday - I don't think these words of Jesus were at the forefront of the disciples' minds - but in later years, 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...”

Brothers and sisters we need to hear Jesus saying this to us this morning as well, as we begin a New Year – one that will be significant for us in many ways as we anticipate some changes, challenges, and along with God's faithful blessings – in his Covenant faithfulness that endures forever!

So it boils down to this, if WE are the ones who picked Jesus, if that relationship started from OUR understanding, OUR desire, OUR determination, OUR choice...

Then in the coming year, when the inevitable trials and challenges of life come along, and we struggle to stay awake... like the disciples did – meaning we struggle to keep our relationship with Jesus vibrant, our commitment to worship Him each Sunday strong, and our countenance cheerful and full of joy... if all that is based on OUR choice, then it won't last, we will succumb to the circumstances of life and fall asleep - so to speak.

We will betray Jesus by putting our loyalties elsewhere. And if you look at where the firstfruits of our time, treasures and talents are allocated it will reveal that He isn't really the **Lord** of our life... He's someone we hang with when it's convenient for us and benefits us.

We will become afraid of the consequences of being identified as His followers and we will deny that we know Jesus...

It means that the desire, the determination, the understanding which WE had to begin this relationship with Jesus wasn't strong enough, isn't deep enough, and it's not big enough to endure the trials of life and it won't last until the end – because its origin and source is in US.

But... if it's true – and I believe it is because Jesus says it – that we did not choose him, but He chose us... then it's not based on us – but on Jesus, on God... and it proves God loves us with an unconditional love which nothing can ever undo – not even our own inability to stay committed to Jesus.

Because as the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 5:8 *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

The good news is that God has already known and 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 and disobedience which we commit as Christ's followers, and

have yet to experience - 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 WE did not choose Him - **HE** chose us! Amen?

So – may the relief and assurance and gratitude that comes from truly believing this truth rebuke and convict of us any inclinations towards spiritual laziness and complacency that our sinful nature will tempt us with.

And instead, may the Holy Spirit motive us and inspire us from that gratitude to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to bearing the fruit – for which Jesus picked us in the first place. Amen?

Now brothers and sisters – 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, by using the second person plural, 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, by switching to the second person singular Jesus is saying that He has personally selected each person connected Valleyview – to be a part of this. **But I chose you**

And then Jesus switches back from the individual to the plural **I appointed y'all to go and bear fruit...** to instruct us that it's not until each of us individually understands that He chose us for the purpose of becoming a group, His body – to bear fruit.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus wants us to understand, that if we do not commit ourselves to fully believing that He chose us, we will never be more than a collection of random individuals.

And brothers and sisters a collection of individuals, even super amazing, talented, high performing individuals will not accomplish much of anything – take our Canadian Jr. hockey team as an example. We have the best individual talented and amazing hockey players in the world – but if they can't work together as a team – they won't win the games, and they won't win the tournament.

Brothers and sisters, the first step in going from a collection of individuals to becoming a group, a team, Christ's body, is to truly believe that we are not here because **we** chose to be – but because **He** chose us to be...

You see if we believe we're here because it's our choice, then we can always choose not to be here as well – if we're busy with something else, if it's not convenient for us, if we're tired or if we're not finding it as engaging or inspiring anymore... Certainly, that's the mindset that we first come with when Christ brings us into His body – His church here at Valleyview.

Because that's how we determine what we choose to belong to elsewhere don't we? Whether it's for our job or schooling or a community where we live, or a sports team or gym membership... we choose when we belong and we choose when we don't belong anymore...

But that's not how we come to belong to the Church – Jesus chose us for His church, and that means it's not our choice to come and go as we please – not that Jesus compels us in His choosing us, or forces us, or blocks the door so we can't leave... It's not like that, He's not like that.

But rather, what His choosing us - to be a part of His church does for us, is to place the onus on us to respond in obedience to participate and to realize that when we want to skip out, to be absent from the Body, we are choosing disobedience.

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

So brothers and sisters, as we start this New Year, let us express the gratitude that God's unconditional love creates in

us by resolving- with the help of the Holy Spirit - to be more obedient and cooperative with Christ choosing us to be part of His Body. Because HE chose us – We can *choose* to obey Him.

And this obedience is one of the fruits that we are to bear – and it is a fruit that will last. As we get into the habit of obedience in belonging to His body, it builds our capacity to obey Christ in all other areas of our lives, throughout our lives.

So, brothers and sisters let's consider and commit ourselves to the following ways in which we can be obedience to Jesus choosing us to be a group together and bear lasting fruit.

Let us be obedient in gathering together, growing together, knowing together and working together. Amen?

So – working together... lets start with our end goal shall we, because that gives us the vision and the mission which highlights the importance of why we are knowing together, growing together as we gather together.

The work that we do together brothers and sisters is to make disciples of all nations. That is our end goal and purpose. Everything else that might be identified as what the church does; like Sunday worship services, preaching the gospel, offering prayers, helping the poor and needy, teaching the Christian faith, guiding people in Christian living, speaking up against social evil and immorality, calling society and gov't to obey God's laws – all of this is subservient to our work of making disciples.

You there are many other groups and organizations which also do some of these things.

There are advocacy groups which specifically focus on social problems, there are charities which specifically help the poor and needy, there are hundreds of preachers and teachers who put their videos on U-tube and you can Google search to find messages and teaching on any topic you are dealing with – but it is only our work **together**, as those whom Jesus has chosen - that can combine all of these various activities and harness them to make disciples.

No other group or organization or gathering in the world is tasked with the purpose and the work of making disciples who are followers of Jesus Christ. That is our unique task – the fruit – which Jesus chose us for. Do you believe it?

But, what does a disciple look like? If we are supposed to make something we kind of need to know what it looks like right? Many years ago – I used to work in a factory, in the press shop where I put piece of sheet metal in big presses and dies to bend it and fold it as part of the process of fabricating – toilet partitions.

It was important that I knew what the piece I was making was supposed to look like so that I made it correctly – and that it could be properly used to complete the whole product that we were making.

It's the same with our work together in making disciples – we need to know what the end result looks like, as well as the various stages along the way. That's what it means that we

must know together – we must all know the vision of what a disciple looks like, and the process for making them.

Now we've got a whole 8 step process of discipleship that we've worked with here at Valleyview, and over this coming year we're going to need to get ourselves familiar with it in order to make sure we're truly working together on it.

But for this morning's purpose, to begin to get a glimpse of what a disciple looks like let me offer this picture; a disciple is someone who is convicted of their sin, has put their faith and trust in Jesus to save them from God's wrath on their sin, is connected to the Church, has been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit.

They are attending worship weekly, praying and reading the scripture daily, knows the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, is giving back to God from their finances, helping the poor and needy, is serving in the Church with their grace gifts, seeking the Lord's directions for their personal life – confessing their sins when they mess up and living by faith in

Jesus grace, AND they know what role they play in making disciples and they are pursuing that. That's quite a picture isn't it! What an amazing thing we are called to make.

Now, can you believe you were chosen to be a part of the group that is called to produce people like this? You're probably wondering *"what was Jesus thinking?? I'm nowhere near like this, I don't look very much like a disciple – how am I, we, supposed to make people this?"*

Well, take heart brothers and sisters because it is a process – its not an instantaneous transformation. Furthermore, you are given this task not because of your natural aptitude for it – but because through it you will continue to experience God's grace. That good things will happen in spite of our sinful shortcomings – but this is why we need to Grow together.

If we are going to make people who read their bibles – then we had better grow in reading them ourselves right? If we are going to make people who pray – we need to start praying. If we are going to make people who make it a priority to

worship on Sunday mornings – we need to be here ourselves, regularly, to set the example for them. If we are going to help others live by grace and rest on Jesus' unconditional choice to make us part of His church – we must grow in that ourselves.

Now the good news is that through the unseen and miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, as we work on growing ourselves together – discipleship will automatically occur – because we're not doing it on our own, we're doing it together, which is why our last point and the starting point is that must Gather together.

Making disciples is not something you can do by yourself, on your own, in private – it requires that we Gather together, frequently – weekly.

And so, we are back to why is it crucial that we believe Jesus chose us, for the purpose of making us into a part of this group here at Valleyview – and we realize it's not really our choice to participate and gather whenever it suits us, or we

have free time, or we feel like we need a pick-me-up. We didn't choose Jesus – Jesus chose us.

Because a collection of individuals who come and go as it suits **them** will never become a group – a team, a Body who is growing **together**, knowing **together**, and working **together** to make disciples.

So, this year it's time we choose to be more intentional about gathering together as Valleyview.

Maybe that means you're going to decide make attending worship on Sundays a regular priority – instead of attending only when you have time... you're going to make time...

Maybe it means that when you **have** to be away – you're planning in advance to make sure there are people to cover for you, and making sure you stay connected while you are gone – joining or listening in online, or reading copies of the message afterwards, getting updates about how people are doing – what needs prayer and so on.

You might have to be away – but you can still stay connected, conversely maybe you're here and attending but you're not really connecting...

So maybe instead of leaving right away after service you're going to stick around for coffee and begin to get to know new people.

Maybe it means that you're going to gathering with the Men's Group, or the Women's group, 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 start serving in way on Sundays or in a program, you'll 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.

Because... deep down we know, and we truly believe that its not about our choice to be here, to be together – its because

Jesus chose each of us, and appointed us – together - to bear fruit.

Y'all did not choose me – but I chose you. Brothers and sisters we meant to be – together!

Amen