

God Picked You!

John 12:12-19, 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 tell your friends about it... You say “watch, that person is going to win it” And when they do, 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 because you picked the winner.

Or maybe you’re a sports fan and every season you’ve got your favorite picks on who will win the World Series, or the Grey Cup, the Superbowl, the Stanley Cup – or this year you’re looking to pick who is going to win the Marble Olympics – I’m a bit O-rangers fan myself after their 2017 win.

And perhaps you’ve got a little something more than bragging rights riding on picking a winner. Maybe you’re so confident about picking a winner that you’ve put down a bet on it, a friendly wager with your friends – and if your pick wins you stand to make a little money.

Now there are many reasons why people will pick one team over another, sometimes it’s sentimental, sometimes its 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 set backs 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 passages this morning? Well many young Jewish men in Jesus' day wanted to pick a winner when it came to choosing which Rabbi whom they would follow for instruction and teaching as they trained and studied in the Law.

Because as a Rabbi grew in status and reputation as a wise, insightful teacher of the Law they would gain respect and recognition and... so would his students, his 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 became popular, if you were one of his original disciples... well that only increased your prestige.

Because that also revealed something about you. That you had a knack to recognize his potential for greatness before anyone else did, that you joined him early on. This spoke volumes about your own abilities and knowledge.

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

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 in deciding to be Jesus' disciples and follow him. He was just a backwater hick from Galilee but look – now everyone in Jerusalem loves him.

But then as they are sitting in the upper room eating their Passover meal a few days later – that famous last supper, Jesus reminds 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 He 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 – thinking they have made a bad pick.

Or perhaps it's better to say that they will need to know that someone is hanging on to them as everything seems to fall apart.

They need to understand they are a part of all that is going to happen not because they chose it - but because someone chose them.

And that someone has determined in spite of the coming events there will be a future for them as follower of Jesus, and a productive lasting one at that, – in spite of how everything will seem to indicate they made a bad choice.

Because brothers and sister the reality is that it wasn't the disciples who saw potential in Jesus – and it isn't even the truth that Jesus saw all the hidden potential in the disciples...

The truth is that Jesus had a plan for who the disciples would become in spite of their lack of potential – and Jesus 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.”

Later that evening, after the last supper – in the midst of all the turmoil that would take place, I don't think the disciples had these words of Jesus at the forefront of their minds.

But years later as they remembered them when they wrote the gospels - they must have marveled and gave thanks to Jesus for His decision to choose them and stick with them as they reflected back upon their actions that night.

Remember how they struggled to stay awake and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane...

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

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

What potential did Jesus ever see in these men? But yet he had said *“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. Especially as we endure the current crisis and circumstances it has created for us.

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

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

When we betray Jesus because circumstances force us to show where our true loyalties lay...

When we pursue actions and lifestyles which proclaim that He isn't really the **Lord** of our life, because our actions speak louder than words...

When we are afraid of the consequences of being identified as a follower of Jesus and we verbally deny that we know Jesus...

That only reveals that our desire, our determination, our understanding that we used to choose to begin this relationship with Jesus wasn't strong enough, wasn't deep enough, wasn't sincere enough to endure the trials of life and our relationship with Jesus won't last until the end.

And brothers and sisters it is not a matter of if this will happen to you – but when.

When the storms of life and the crises of faith inevitably come, your choice will not survive it.

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

Then our faith and following Jesus will not only survive the storms of life and the inevitable crises of faith, it will become stronger and these instances will become part of how God refines and purifies us.

That is why James 1:2-4 says *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

Now maybe we need to hear this and be reminded of this biblical truth this morning because circumstances having us struggles with a crisis of faith in some way...

Or maybe we often find ourselves struggling in our experience of following Jesus, and we are so often frustrated and we feel like we just can't do this "being a Christian" thing...

Brothers and sisters – the sooner you make peace with the truth, the scripture truth, which Jesus himself says to us “*You did not choose me, but I chose you - and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last*” the sooner we will start to experience the peace that comes in spite of whatever crisis or circumstances we are going through.

And we will have a confidence that comes not from ourselves, but from Jesus because we realize that His choice of us rest on His love and faithfulness and not on our qualities or lack thereof.

We begin to trully understand what it means that God loves us with an unconditional love which we ourselves can ever undo.

That is why the Apostle Paul says 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.”*

Brothers and sisters 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 and 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 – in order to bear fruit! Amen!

Now Brothers and sisters – there is another side to Jesus' statement that we need to hear this morning as well, not as individuals but as a group.

And it comes from the personal pronouns Jesus is using in these words he spoke to the disciples.

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 these words brothers and sisters, Jesus is speaking to us as a group – as a church, that our composition isn't just a haphazard collection whoever shows up or logs on 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 that Jesus has personally selected each and every individual here to be connected Valleyview – and to be his followers. - ***But I chose you***

But not as a group of individuals who all follow Jesus on their own by themselves each doing their own things...

because Jesus switches from the individual back to the plural again - ***I appointed y'all to go and bear fruit...***

Brothers and sisters it's not until we understand that Jesus chose each of us that we truly become the Church– His body.

Brothers and sisters Jesus says to us that unless we understand in our hearts that **He chose** us, you will never be more than just a group of individuals each doing our own thing... and a group of individuals will not accomplish much of anything that will last – it's like herding cats.

It's only as we understand and truly believe the truth that Christ chose each us individually to become part of His body where together as a group we go and accomplish something together that we start to actually become His body – the Church and we begin to accomplish lasting achievements.

Brothers and sisters Christ's chose us, and His plan for us is to move us from being individualistic 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 how we respond to His choice as either obedient, or disobedient...

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

That is why the believers in the book of Acts were always meeting together – for worship, for study, to care for each other and to eat together in fellowship.

This is why Hebrews 10:25 says *"let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing."*

Brothers and sisters we are not fully the Body of Christ, the Church, unless we are gathered together.

This biblical truth is why, in our current circumstances that prevent us from gathering together in person, we are attempting to meeting together as best we can online.

This is why I am not simply pre-recording and posting a video for you to watch at your leisure at home on your own.

Now I am not knocking those who are using this as a resource to continue to minister their congregations at this time – in many ways that is exactly what the Apostles had to do to for their churches – they wrote letters to them... because they could not be with them in person, and that is how we came to have the New Testament.

Now nobody would state that an individual person with a bible constitutes the Church as the Body of Jesus Christ, yet we often act like this is what we believe in regards to gathering together with each other – or at least we did before we were no longer able to gather together in person.

Brothers and sisters, the inability to meet together for worship is a challenge and a crisis for the church not because we miss each but because it is going to reveal what we really believe – or don't believe – about what it means for us to BE the Body of Christ.

Right now I hear many stories of churches who are experiencing high numbers of people watching their U-tube services, and more people are attending online than they were in person.

But when other options start to open up again on Sunday mornings – will those numbers hold?

I guarantee you that after this is all over many people are going to question why they should go out to worship on Sunday morning after they have experienced the convenience of watching a service online at home.

And for those who are eager to get back – why is it that?

What are you getting from being together in person that you can't get from watching online or logging into Zoom church? Or what are you getting that you couldn't find in working out at the gym or hitting the golf course with your friends?

That's good to think about because it forces us to look at and learn the scriptural truth about what it means to BE TOGETHER as the Church and to bring our beliefs and actions in line with what the scripture teaches us, so that we are prepared and ready to begin meeting together again and that we will have experienced significant growth in BEING the Church through this pandemic crisis.

So we'll be looking at this and learning about this all through the month of May - and we start off this morning with the foundational scriptural teaching that being a part of the Christ's body – His church - was not our choice, but His choice for us, and that Christ intends for us to be a group together.

And I know this challenges us brothers and sisters.

Because we're conditioned and taught by our society to believe that what religion and church is our own personal private choice and if we are not happy with something, if there are difficulties or it challenges sinfulness in us... it is our choice to simply walk away from it.

But that's not what Jesus wanted for us – for his disciples... So 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” and tells us the truth we are to believe instead.

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 by changing our thinking and planning to change our actions.

When we are able to meet in person again – how will you be more intentional about gathering together as Valleyview... as

Christ's Church and TOGETHER doing what Christ has chosen us to do to bear lasting fruit?

Maybe that means you're going to decide make participating in worship on Sunday a regular priority – 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 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.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus has seen fit to allow a season where His church is not able to meet together as usual – perhaps because we treated it so casually before this...

And we truly only learn to appreciate something and learn its true value and significance when it is taken away from us.

Brothers and sisters – let us then apply ourselves diligently in this season to learn and understand and prepare ourselves in the truth of what it means to Be the Church and to Gather together as the Body of Christ.

Because we did not choose this for ourselves – Christ has chosen this for us. Amen.