

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: John 15:9-17

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

*¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but **I chose you**. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

Jesus chooses us. I like that, probably because I was never popular. I’ve always been an introvert, even more so when I was younger, but it is still true today. I’m not brilliant or athletic, I didn’t, and still don’t, wear all the top-brand clothes or shoes, and I was never the one chosen first for anything, except maybe to answer a question I couldn’t answer. That could be a real downer. But, looking back on my life, and putting these things into perspective, that really doesn’t matter. What matters is that Jesus has chosen me, just as he has chosen you. Now that’s what really matters! That is something to celebrate!

We hear Jesus, while speaking to his disciples, tell them that they did not choose him, but he chose them. We also are chosen. If it were not so, would God have sent Jesus into the world, to live through him and make His presence known? He sent Jesus to save humanity for all time. God did not need to do this. Indeed, this is the greatest sign of God’s deep love for all, as well as evidence that we are chosen.

Those who have not figured that out yet, likely have not bonded with Jesus as he illustrates through the story of the vine and the branches in the verses just prior to what we had read to us today. In summary, God is the Gardener, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. The Gardener, cares for and oversees the whole vineyard, and as I already mentioned, God (the Gardener) and Jesus are intimately connected as one.

We get our spiritual life nourishment from abiding in Jesus. Abiding in Jesus means more than simply connecting with him. Abiding in him means allowing His Word and His presence to fill our minds, direct our wills and transform our affections. It requires from us to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Jesus. It is through Jesus that we know God and intimately connect with God, too.

We read in verse eleven then, that Jesus said, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” When we meditate on these truths, we realize how special this is. We are chosen for joy, joy, not only that we know we will find in the lifetime yet to come, but also in the journey of this lifetime.

Following Jesus is not easy; but as a Christian, we find joy in doing and saying the right things, the things that are pleasing to God. A Christian’s joy is contagious. William Barclay writes, “A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms.” Why should a Christian be gloomy since they know that even though they sin, they are redeemed, forgiven and freed of their sin?

We are chosen for love, to be loved and to love others. Just as we are loved, we are to love others.

Heidi Neumark, author of “Breathing Space,” shares this story about love. She says, “While a college student, Heidi took a year off to serve in a volunteer program sponsored by Rural Mission. She went to Johns Island off the Carolina coast, where she listened to the stories of the sons and daughters of plantation slaves. This is what she learned: The most important lesson I learned on Johns Island was from Miss Ellie, who lived miles down a small dirt road in a one-room, wooden home. We’d sit in old rocking chairs on the front porch, drinking tall glasses of sweet tea, while she’d tell me stories. I never could find out Miss Ellie’s precise age, but it was somewhere between ninety and one hundred. Maybe she didn’t know herself, she still chopped her own firewood, stacked in neat little piles behind her house.

Miss Ellie had a friend named Netta, whom she’d known since they were small girls. To get to Netta’s house, Miss Ellie had to walk for miles through fields of tall grass. This was sweet grass that Sea Island women make famous baskets out of, but it was also home to numerous poisonous snakes.

Actually, Netta’s house was not that far from Miss Ellie’s place, but there was a stream that cut across the fields. You had to walk quite a distance to get to the place where it narrowed enough to pass. Poor Miss Ellie, I thought, old and arthritic, having to walk all that way, pushing through the thick summer heat, not to mention avoiding snakes.

I hit upon the perfect plan. I arranged for some men to help build a simple plank bridge across the stream near Miss Ellie’s house. I scouted out the ideal place – not too wide, but too deep to cross. Our bridge was built in a day. I was so excited that I could hardly wait to see Miss Ellie’s reaction. I went to her house and practically dragged her off with me. ‘Look!’ I shouted, ‘a shortcut to visit Netta!’

Miss Ellie did not look grateful. Instead, she shook her head and looked at me with pity. ‘Child, I don’t need a shortcut,’ she said. Then she told about all the friends she kept up with on her way to visit Netta: Mr. Jenkins with whom she always swapped gossip; Miss Hunter, who so looked forward to the quilt scraps she’d bring by; the raisin wine she’d taste at one place in exchange for her biscuits; and the chance to look in on ‘old folks’ who were sick.

‘Child, you can’t take shortcuts if you want friends in this world,’ she told me. ‘Shortcuts don’t mix with love.’”

Just as Jesus loved us into the kingdom, we should love others into the kingdom. We can’t take shortcuts when it comes to loving others. Jesus says, we should go to the fullest extent of showing them Jesus and wrapping them in his love. Brow beating and quarreling does not present an accurate picture of Jesus; worse yet, it does not share the reality of Jesus’ love with others.

We are chosen for friendship with Jesus. He told his disciples that they are not his slaves any longer; he calls them friends. It may sound wrong to us that Jesus seems to initially refer to them as once being his slaves. These words would have greater meaning to those who were listening to Jesus speak. It will help us to understand what Jesus means here, if we pause for a bit of a Greek lesson.

The word used here as slave (or servant) in Greek is *doulos*, meaning one who gives himself up to another’s will as in those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing his cause among men. It means being devoted to another to the disregard of one’s own interests. It was not meant as a title of shame, but rather one of honor.

Examples of those who were “doulos” of God are numerous throughout the bible. In Deuteronomy 34:5 we read that Moses is to be remembered as a servant of the Lord. Joshua and David are also referred to as servants of the Lord. There are scriptural references where the Apostle Paul and James claim it as an honor to be a servant of the Lord. These men and many others, both men and women, were proud to be called the douloi, the slaves/servants of God.

But now Jesus gives them something greater, intimate friendship, with him and with God. This points out that before the time of Jesus, intimacy with God was unknown.

The word friend has a background of its own that those listening understood. In Isaiah 41:8, Isaiah, speaking for God says that Abraham was God’s friend. This brought to mind a custom held by Roman Emperors and eastern kings. These rulers often had a very select chosen group of men known as the friends of the Emperor or the friends of the king.

These friends, unlike anyone else, could approach the king at any time; they even had permission to enter the king’s bedchamber early in the morning, before the king really got started with his day. When the king needed to talk things over with someone, he went to these chosen friends to talk with them before they went to anyone else, including military leaders, or other governing leaders usually considered advisors to the king. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and most intimate connection with him.

Put this all together, brothers and sisters, and understand that Jesus calls us to be his friends and the friends of God. We have direct access to God anytime we want and anywhere we are. God is not a stranger, or some distant entity, but he is right here with us, intimately as no one else can be. Jesus tells us this in verse 15 and 16: “I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” And then he says: “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”

We are chosen friends of Jesus, which obviously has its benefits; and he has honored us by offering us partnership with Him in his mission. This is a calling of the highest nature for the greatest purpose of leading the world to God. We were not chosen for friendship with him, just to keep it all to ourselves. Jesus said he has appointed us and sends us out to be ambassadors, to take his love and message to the world. He appointed us to bear fruit, lasting fruit, setting first the example to lead others to Jesus, and then supporting them into maturity.

Then Jesus says, that as his chosen friends, appointed of for these purposes,” that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” Mistakenly, some people think this means that because we are Christians, we are given a blank check to get whatever we want. This is not the case. If we abide in Jesus, we know this.

Our prayers should be immersed in faithfulness. Prayers that are offered that we already know go against God’s will and desire for us, or that will result in hurting someone else, then we are foolish to ask them in the first place. Our prayers should always be that God’s will be done. Our prayers must never be selfish. We should always take all of our prayers to God. But the prayers of the chosen always have an openness and respect for God’s wisdom and will. That is not always easy to accept, yet the more we love God, and live in his love, the easier it becomes. So no, these words about prayer are not a blank check so that we can get whatever we want.

Let’s put together all of the pieces of Jesus message John 15. Yes, brothers and sisters, Jesus chooses us and calls us friends. And, as his chosen ones, fully knowledgeable and abiding in his love, he commands us to love one another, which we all can do as we abide in his love. This will be our undeniable witness to all those around us, so that all may become friends of Jesus.

May 5, 2024 - Jesus Chooses Us

I like the story about 3 prospectors who found a rich vein of gold in California during the gold rush days. They realized what a great discovery they had, & decided, "We've a really good thing going here as long as no one else finds out about it." So, they each took a vow to keep it secret.

Then they headed for town to file their claims & get the equipment necessary to mine the gold. True to their vows, they didn't say a word to anybody. They filed their claim, bought the equipment, & headed back to their mine. But when they did, a crowd of people followed them.

And the reason was because the expression on their faces had given them away. Their faces were aglow in anticipation of the wealth that soon would be theirs. People knew that they must have found something very special. So, a crowd followed them out of town.

Jesus chooses us to be his friends. May we glow with joy because of this treasure we have found, and lead people to Jesus. Amen.