

Sermon Easter 6b 2018: God Has Chosen Us

Introduction: Choosing and Being Chosen

I received a number of comments and emails about my sermon last week;

And particularly about the story I told about the time I was spending

With friends who were up to no good and how my Dad called me on it;

And gave me the little proverb, if you run with skunks,

You're going to begin to smell like one.

I received some more clever quotes on the subject like George Washington who said,

“It's better to be alone than in bad company”;

“Tell me who you walk with and I'll tell you who you are”:

“A mirror reflects a person's face, but what you are really like

Is seen in the friends you choose.”

And the conversations and emails got me thinking more deeply about

How who we spend time with and who we associate with says a lot about who we are;

Sometimes who we spend time with, who we choose as our friends

Builds our reputation for good or tears it down;

And the same can be said when someone chooses us as their friend:

It either builds up how others see us

Or suggests aspects of who we are that aren't all that good.

But sometimes the company we keep and the friends we choose has nothing to do

With our reputation or whether we're on the right track;

Sometimes the company we keep and the friends we make is something more.

I mean look at the company that Jesus kept in His earthly ministry;

To the religious establishment of Jesus' day, He couldn't possibly be the Messiah;

Because He associated Himself with the blind, the sick and the lame;

The prostitutes, the tax collectors, grubby fisherman and women and children.

Surely Jesus couldn't be the Messiah, the religious authorities thought;
For if He was He would be friends with righteous people, like us.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for the religious authorities of Jesus' day
Is that Jesus spent time with people who were not good for His reputation;
People who were not following the law effectively;
People who were not blessed with wealth or position or power;
People who were at the edges of good society
Rather than the shining lights of their day.

Fortunately for them and for those of us gathered here today at St. David's;
Jesus chose a different set of friends.

Jesus chose to spend time with people who weren't always righteous;
But who knew they had a need for God in their lives;
Jesus chose to spend time with people who had made many bad choices in their lives
And who were seeking a way to return to a better life;
Jesus chose to spend time with people who were downtrodden and broken;
And who couldn't rise up on their own, but for the love and power of God.

And at the Last Supper, where we are listening in this morning;
Jesus not only talks about His coming betrayal and death and resurrection;
But He also talks about His deep love for His followers;
Those who He loves as the Father has loved Him;
Those He no longer calls servants, but His friends;
Those who have not chosen Him, but He has chosen them.

Jesus is turning our common knowledge of being defined by the company we keep on edge;
Jesus is overturning our human judgment that defines who we are by the company we keep;
With a standard that is set as those who are loved by God and love others in return.
It's a promise of God's all-encompassing love for every child of God, sinner or righteous;

And creates a new community defined by nothing less than God's presence and God's love.

God Chooses Us, But Not as a Privilege

I love this passage of scripture because it reminds us that as Christians;

We are part of a community of love and forgiveness;

And that even when we fail to measure up to God's standards or human standards;

We can try again and return to the one community,

Can be restored to the one group of friends that matters most.

As a teenager and well into my adult life, I had a little cheap icon

With Jesus looking out into the world and this scripture, "You have not chosen me,

But I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bear fruit."

It reminds us that God is the initiator of our relationship, our community

It's God who has chosen us and is choosing you and me today;

Not the other way around.

We may decide one day that we want to be a Christian;

Or say that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world;

But we have not made that choice and will not make that choice all on our own.

You see, from the moment of our conception in our mothers' wombs, God chose us;

In sending His Son, Jesus, into the world, God chose us;

And from beginning of time, God has been whispering His choice in our ears;

God has been quietly and persistently singing that choice to us

In a love song that speaks quietly to our hearts;

And leads us into this community of God's love.

Its verses can be read in the smile of a child or a beautiful sunrise;

It can be heard in the chorus of a familiar hymn

Or the gracious words 'I forgive you' from God and from one another;

God has chosen us.

God has chosen you and me, but not as a privilege of popularity or of power or a point of pride;
No, God has chosen us and given us a three part commission:

Chosen us to Love, Chosen us as Friend, Chosen and appointed us to bear fruit;
To make a difference in the lives of others and the life of the world.

God has chosen us to love to give us value, to define us as someone who is worthy;
And if you've ever not been chosen for a team growing up

Because you were the smallest or the slowest or the least coordinated;
Or if you've ever been passed over in a relationship with someone
You were really attracted to;
Or if you weren't hired or didn't get the promotion or bonus;

Then you know how important and empowering it is that God has chosen you and me to love.

It's as though God spread out all the pictures of all the most undeserving people in the world;
On top of His massive desk, reached out and said, "This is the one, I choose you."

And then He wrapped you in the arms of His unconditional, undeserved love;
And the good news is that God does this with each of us individually;
God purposefully and carefully chose each of us individually;
To love us individually and uniquely;
You and I have been chosen for God's love.

And God has chosen us as friend;

Knowing we are loved is one of the most life giving gifts God or anyone can give us;
But knowing you are someone's friend is something more;
Doesn't it make you feel good when someone you know;
Introduces you to someone else and tells the person,
"I'd like you to meet one of my best friends."

It lifts the spirits, it draws us closer to one another;

And that's exactly what Jesus is doing at the Last Supper and today with us;
Changing our status in His eyes and God's eyes and everyone's eyes;
I'm no longer calling you my servants, he says, but my friends.

One of my favorite stories on this subject of Jesus choosing us as His friends

Is about the couple who were traveling through Ireland

And stopped at a roadside shrine where they saw a man kneeling before a statue of Christ

The kneeling man had a beaming smile on His face and tears streaming from his eyes;

When he got up, the couple approached him and said,

“You must really love God;”

To which the man replied while dusting off the dirt from his pants,

“Yes, my friend, the Lord, is very fond of me.”

We have all been chosen as a friend of Jesus.

Being chosen as persons for Jesus to love and as His friends has some marvelous advantages;

But it also comes with responsibilities; we’ve been appointed.

We have work to do, you and I, work not to earn God’s love and friendship;

But because we have God’s love and friendship;

Because God is very fond of us and wants us to show and tell others

About the promise that God has chosen them, too.

You and I have been called to love as Jesus loves;

We have been called to love the righteous and the unrighteous;

The people we want to love and even those we’re not so sure we want to love;

We’ve been called to be friends as Jesus is our friend;

Walking beside one another in the darkness and in the light;

So that no one is lonely and no one is alone.

We have been chosen by God and in accepting His choice;

He has given us important work to do so that all the world may know the love of God;

And live their lives for God and one another in fruitful ways;

Ways that help usher in the kingdom of God in our own little ways as individuals

And as this community on a mission to know Christ and make Christ known to others.

Drawing Others into Christian Community

There are so many ways we have been called to live into our chosenness;

So many ways to build up this community of God's friends and bear fruit in the world;

So many ways to allow the Holy Spirit to empower us in this Christian life.

But in this time of our annual meeting;

And in a time in our world that is lost in its divisions and animosity from group to group,

Including divisions in our own nation, I invite you today and this week

To befriend someone and invite them to come to church;

Invite them to come and experience the love and the friendship

With God and one another we know and are coming to know in this place.

81% of us are in church because someone, like Jesus,

Befriended and invited us to come and follow;

We're here because someone chose us as worthy or needful of joining the Christian community;

And yet the studies show that an Episcopalian, on average, only invites someone to church;

Once every 27 years;

We can do better than that.

Every study done to determine why people join churches

Reveals that the invitation and influence of a friend

Is the single most significant factor in why people join churches

And it is why most of us are here today: A friend welcomed us in.

And though we may not all be the best and the brightest; the most popular and talented;

A community that always does the right thing in every circumstance;

We are friends of Jesus and that's pretty good company;

That's pretty good company for us to belong to

And for us to invite others to come and join in so that love we know

May be known among our friends and one day in all the world.

Amen.

