

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta
“God Has Chosen You” (John 15:16)

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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Happy Mother’s Day!

In my opinion being a mom is the most important job in the world, although it does not pay very well. Many years ago a mom I knew (not my mom, not Steph) told me being a mom was a million dollar experience—she would not trade it for a million dollars...and she would not do it again for a million dollars. Last week I came across a newsfeed about a four-year old named Noah who really likes Sponge Bob Popsicles—so much so in fact that he got on his mom’s Amazon account and ordered 918 Sponge Bob Popsicles for a grand total of \$2,618.85—yikes! So, a special Happy Mother’s Day to Noah’s mom.

One of my favorite memories of my mom happened when I was in 8th grade. One afternoon when I got home from school I did what I always did: made a beeline for the refrigerator. My mom came into the kitchen with her Bible and told me she had been reading that day and came across a scripture that she felt God really wanted her to share to me. I was touched (how thoughtful!) and asked her if she would share that scripture with me. She handed me her King James Bible and pointed to Matthew 17:15, where I read, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic.” Little did I know how prophetic that scripture would prove to become.

I am preaching from just one verse in today’s powerful gospel reading. Jesus had just finished the Last Supper where he had washed his disciples’ feet and instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. As they are walking through a vineyard on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus tells them something very simple but very powerful: “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16).

“You did not choose me but I chose you”—that is a microcosm of the entire gospel in that when we did not choose God, but chose everything and anything else instead, God still chose us. This gospel is based on the grace of God, grace that supersedes everything in your life, even the choices you make.

Think about the choices you have made in your life—not so much the small choices like what kind of cereal you would eat or what clothes you would wear today—but the life altering choices you have made: like your career path, whether or not you would marry and if so to whom, how you would manage your finances, who you would trust to really be there for you. Think of the choices in your life that proved to be absolutely the right choices and you are so thankful that you made them—and think about the bad choices you have made that proved to be disastrous in some way. So much can hinge on the choices we make.

The annual National Football League draft just occurred. Each year NFL teams scramble to attain the highest draft picks possible in order to draft players who will improve or revitalize their team. Some teams make draft choices that prove to be the right ones, while other teams fail to choose the players they should have chosen—either way, there are always long term ripple effects for every team. For example, in the 2000 NFL Draft there was a quarterback from Michigan who was not chosen until the sixth round. 198 players were drafted before a certain quarterback who played at Michigan—a certain quarterback named Tom Brady, who has gone on to win a record 7 Super Bowls—was finally chosen.

One of my favorite romantic comedies is the 2000 film *The Family Man* starring Nicholas Cage and Tea Leoni. The film depicts what would happen in the lives of Jack and Kate based on a single choice—whether they would marry after college and have a family—with all the joys and stresses that would involve—or whether they would choose not to marry and as single people enjoy their respective lucrative careers and lavish lifestyles. Over the course of the film you see both scenarios played out. At the end of the film Jack awakens to his single life—with his lucrative career and lavish lifestyle...but no Kate and no kids. He rushes to the airport to catch Kate, who is about to board a plane for Paris:

“Kate!” Jack calls out, “You can’t go. Don’t get on that plane. Please! Let’s just go have a cup of coffee—that’s all I’m asking for. I’m sure there’s another flight to Paris tonight.” Kate is puzzled and walks over to him, “Jack, what are you doing here? Do you need closure? Because if you do after all these years, you got it, I’m okay, I’m fine. I was heartbroken, Jack, but I got over it and I moved on and you should move on too. Okay? I’m sorry, I gotta go. I’m sorry, Jack.” Kate then turns away and makes her way back to the front of the boarding line.

But Jack doesn't leave. He calls out, "We have a house in Jersey! We have two kids: Annie and Josh. Annie's not much of a violin player but she tries real hard. She's a little precocious but that's only because she says what's on her mind, and when she smiles...and Josh, he has your eyes. He doesn't say much but we know he's smart. He's always got his eyes open, he's always watching us. Sometimes you can just look at him and you know that he's learning something new—it's like witnessing a miracle. The house is a mess, but it's ours—after 122 more payments it's gonna be ours."

Jack continues, "And Kate, you're a non-profit lawyer. That's right, you're completely non-profit, but that doesn't seem to bother you. And we're in love, and after thirteen years of marriage we're still unbelievably in love. I sing to you, not all the time but definitely on special occasions. You know, we've dealt with our share of surprises and we've made a lot of sacrifices but we stayed together. You see, you're a better person than I am—and made me a better person to be around you. I don't know, maybe it was all just a dream and I imagined it all, but I swear, nothing has ever felt more real. And if you get on that plane right now, you'll disappear forever. I know we could both go on with our lives and we'd both be fine but I've seen what we can be like together, and I choose us. Please, Kate, one cup of coffee. You can always go to Paris—just please, not tonight." Kate pauses for a long moment, gazing intently into Jack's eyes and finally smiles, "Okay, Jack." The credits roll as Jack and Kate excitedly share a cup of coffee.

What Jack does for Kate in this scene mirrors what Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me but I chose you"—and only then does Kate respond by choosing to have a cup of coffee with Jack.

One of the best known passages of the Old Testament is from the Book of Joshua. As you may remember, Joshua succeeded Moses as the one anointed by God to lead the Israelites out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Near the end of his life, after decades of war and toil as the Israelites indeed settled in the Promised Land, Joshua famously exhorts Israel, "Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). "Choose this day whom you will serve"—that is the law. The problem is that more often than not, even if people promise to serve the Lord, often they break that promise and choose to serve anyone or anything but the Lord.

And yet, in spite of that, ultimately the Lord still chooses you—just as Jesus told his disciples in today’s passage, “You did not choose me but I chose you.” That is the gospel. That is the grace of God. And often God chooses people you would never expect to do something special in and through their lives—as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Similarly the Apostle Peter put it this way:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

“You did not choose me but I chose you”...that is God’s word to you today. Even if—*especially* if—you are foolish or weak or low and despised, God has still chosen you to be part of God’s chosen race and royal priesthood and holy nation—aka, the church. Even if you have been sitting in the draft watching player after player be chosen over you—perhaps even 198 players—God has still chosen you. Even if you are a lunatic—and yes even if you have used your mom’s Amazon account to order 918 Sponge Bob Popsicles, God has still chosen you.

“You did not choose me but I chose you”...God has chosen you—to do something special in and through your life. Jesus was and is so committed to choosing you that he died to prove it. And because God has chosen you, as we prayed in the collect for today, God has prepared for you “such good things as surpass (your) understanding” (*The Book of Common Prayer* 225).

In other words, Jack’s words to Kate are Jesus’ words to you today, “I’ve seen what we can be like together, and I choose us.”

Amen.