

WHAT WILL OUR ANSWER BE?

Why are you here? Not, why are you here at church, but why are you here, you of all people? In other words, why did God call you? You know you better than anyone, right? So you must know, or at least have an inkling, about why, out of all the people in the universe, God called you to be a disciple of Jesus, and to witness, by your words and your actions, to the truth of the gospel.

Sure, you do the best you can in life, and God loves you for it. But even so, you realize your weaknesses, all the ways you try and fail and try and fail and . . . well, you get the picture. So, why did God call you? Why were you chosen?

Many people get it backwards. They have it in their minds that they chose God, but they're mistaken. It's always God who takes the initiative, God who does the choosing. The only thing the chosen ones of God get to do is choose how to answer God when they've been chosen. Will it be "Yes," "No," "Maybe," "Not yet, perhaps later," "I'm not sure, let me sleep on it"?

The choice is ours, once God has chosen us.

Yes, God chooses us. I know that's not the way we're conditioned to think. Especially us Christians. We say, "You must accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and then you'll be saved." In other words, you choose. But in reality, the choice has already been made. Jesus Christ has chosen us, and here we are. Which leads me back to my original question. Why? Why has the Lord chosen you and chosen me, warts and all, seemingly ignoring our failings and shortcomings and saying, "I pick you!"

Beats me. Sometimes, when I think about the fact God chose me to be an ordained minister, me of all people, I say, "Lord, I don't know if you had an off day or what, but you surely could have done a lot better. There had to have been much higher quality people out there that you could have picked."

Perhaps God will explain it to me when I stand before God on the Last Day. And maybe God will say, "Fred, I didn't say 'I choose you;' I said 'I choose Lou.' And we'll both have a good laugh. But until then, I'll keep on carrying on as though God did choose me for this daunting, challenging, sacred task of parish ministry, and continue to wonder why.

I wonder if young David felt the same way and had the same questions when God picked him to be the future king of Israel. Surely he must have asked himself, at least once, “Why did the Lord choose me?” David’s experience sounds a bit like the American Dream. Here he was, the little guy who made good. Like the child who grew up in poverty and became the CEO of a billion dollar company, or the scrawny kid who was taken under the wing of a caring coach because the coach believed in him, and that kid became a star athlete in the NBA or the NFL, David the humble shepherd boy was chosen by God to rule over God’s people.

All the great sons of Jesse were paraded before the prophet Samuel, but Samuel said that for all their fine outward appearances, none of them was the one God had in mind for the new king. After they all paraded past, the only son left was little David, who had been out tending the sheep. David was summoned and, surprise! Everyone gasped as Samuel announced, “This is the one.”

Why would God have chosen David? Was it because he had great potential that hadn’t yet been recognized? Or because, as the youngest son, David had learned early to fend for himself, to take on responsibility, to grow in wisdom and courage as he watched over the flocks of his father, Jesse?

We’re not told. God’s choices are often mysterious, surprising, and beyond our ability to figure out. God chooses whom God will choose, and in David’s case, God’s choice resulted in the greatest king Israel ever anointed. “The Lord is my shepherd,” wrote David; and the Lord also chose a shepherd.

From the least came the greatest.

Those words, “from the least came the greatest,” seem familiar because even if we’ve never heard this story of David’s selection before, we have seen God at work before, lifting up the lowly, choosing those who are on the bottom rung and putting them on the top, making “the last first.” Jesus talked about that, and it was a significant part of his earthly ministry. And in a way, Jesus himself was an example of the way God often calls and commissions those whom the world regards as lowly and of no account to do God’s work in the world. After all, he was just a carpenter’s son.

“To what can I compare the Kingdom of God?” Jesus asked his disciples one day. The kingdom of God is like, well, it’s like a tiny mustard seed. That’s what Mark recorded in this morning’s Gospel reading. The kingdom of God is like a tiny, insignificant mustard seed, “the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.” But when that seed germinates, said Jesus, it will grow and grow and grow until it becomes . . . a weed about two feet high.

A weed? The kingdom of God is like a weed?

“Yes,” continued Jesus, “a plant strong enough that small birds can come and perch in its branches—well, if they’re very small birds.”

“That’s not very impressive,” the almost certainly disappointed disciples must have thought. “Actually, Jesus, in all honesty, and with all due respect, we really don’t like being compared to a weed.”

Evidently, judging from the parable of the mustard seed, God looks at things differently than the way we look at things. And what we see as common, small, and of little value-- Surprise!—God regards as miraculous, wonderful, and the very core of God’s reign.

Why were you chosen by God to be a disciple? Why are you here? Are you the little mustard seed that God has planted to grow into a weed that gives shelter and shade to God’s most vulnerable creatures? God’s choices, as I said earlier, are often mysterious and puzzling. That’s because God sees more than we see when God looks at people. As the prophet Samuel said to a befuddled Jesse when David was chosen to be the next king of Israel, “People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

So, although we might not know or understand what God had in mind when he chose you, and chose me, for God’s purpose, God knows, and God understands. And that’s really all that matters.

Caryll Houselander, in his book *The Reed of God*, wrote: “Sometimes it may seem to us that there is no purpose in our lives, that going day after day for years to this office or that school or factory is nothing else but waste and weariness. But it may be that God has sent us there because, but for us, Christ would not be there. And if our being there means that Christ is there, that alone makes it worthwhile.” Or, in the words of singer-songwriter Paul Simon in his song *Slip-Sliding Away*, “God only knows; and God makes his plans. The information’s unavailable to the mortal man.” But as long as it’s God who knows and is making the plans, that’s all that matters.

Why were you and I chosen by God to be a disciple? Why are we here? I have to believe that it was for a good reason and important purpose, because after all, God knows and chooses those who are able to do God’s work. Think about your life: the people you have come in contact with each day; the things you do; the places you go. Perhaps God chose you to be God’s representative in those places, among those people, so they could catch a glimpse of Christ in you and through you.

In Anne Tyler’s novel *Saint Maybe*, she tells the story of a man named Ian Bedloe. Ian committed a terrible sin early in his life. And he had spent most of his life trying to atone for the sad deed. As part of his atonement, Ian had dropped out of college to raise his brother’s three children. The most important part of Ian’s life was *the Church of the Second Chance*. It had provided Ian with

the support and community he needed.

One day, the pastor of the church, the Reverend Emmett, suggested that Ian go to Bible College to be trained as his replacement when he was no longer able to carry on his ministry and do the work of the church. Ian protested that he had responsibilities. And more than that . . .

“What?” Reverend Emmett asked.

“I mean, shouldn’t I hear a call to the ministry?”

Reverend Emmett said, “Maybe I’m that call.”

Ian blinked.

And maybe not, of course,” said Reverend Emmett. “But it’s always a possibility.”

And that’s how God’s call often works—with one Christian speaking to another, perhaps with both of them wondering why in the world God called them to be disciples. But maybe, just maybe, they were called to be disciples to each other at that very moment.

And maybe we were, too.

God works in mysterious ways, my friends. And I believe the most logical answer to the mystery of why God has chosen us is simply, why not? Why not us? God sees something in us or about us—even if we don’t see it in or about ourselves—that made God decide, “I’m choosing you.”

And now the ball is in our court. The choice is ours. It can be “Yes,” or “No,” or “Maybe,” or “Not yet, perhaps later” or “I’m not sure, let me sleep on it”?

So, how are we going to respond to the Lord’s call? What will our answer be?

That’s up to us. May we choose faithfully and courageously. Amen.