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“I CHOOSE YOU”

Luke 5:1-11, 27-32; 6:12-16

“I choose you.”

In the beginning when {Ge 1:27, TNIV} **“God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness’,”** he was saying *“I choose you”* to our entire species – and to every individual who would ever bear his image, including you and me.

“I choose you.”

Two millennia ago when {Jn 1:1, 14} **“The Word [who] was God...became flesh,”** {Php 2:7} **“taking the very nature of a servant... and [becoming] obedient...even [to] death on a cross”** he was saying *“I choose you”* to all humanity and each of us.

“I choose you.”

When the Holy Spirit formed the Church as a {1 Pe 2:9} **“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God”** he was saying *“I choose you”* to everyone who would ever say “Yes!” to Jesus, including us.

“I choose you.”

■ Luke 5 and 6 describe three episodes of choosing. In 5:1-11 Jesus says to four fishermen, **“from now on you will fish for people.”**

■ In vv 27-32 he says to a tax collector, **“Follow me.”**

■ Then in Luke 6:12-16 he “[chooses] **twelve**” men from among his **“disciples,”** **“whom he also [designates] apostles.”**

✎ The first remarkable thing about these episodes is that *the Messiah does the choosing.*

Simply having disciples is not unusual. Most first century Rabbis have disciples who tag along and absorb their teachings. Any {France} **“good teacher [is] expected to have a group of such ‘followers.’”**

However, it is always the pupil who comes to the teacher and asks permission to follow. Jesus turns that custom on its head: he takes the initiative, draws near, and calls on the individual to follow him.

To Simon Peter, Jesus says *“I choose you.”*

To Simon’s brother Andrew, whom Luke does not specifically name, but whom Matthew and Mark do in their accounts, Jesus says, *“I choose you.”*

To James and John, Jesus says *“I choose you.”*

To Levi, Jesus says *“I choose you.”*

To the Twelve, Jesus says *“I choose you.”*

So it is with us. God takes the initiative to pursue and woo us. We are at liberty to say “Yes, I will follow Jesus” or “No, I won’t follow” – but only because he has already said, **“Follow me.”**

The Living God does not wait for us to come to him. He comes to us. Why? We are important to him! He highly values us! He chooses *us.*

✎ The second remarkable thing about these episodes is *whom the Messiah chooses.*

Most leaders try to get the movers and the shakers on their team. They go after the brightest and the best, can-do people who know how to go the distance and raise big money and work the system and get things done.

- But who does Jesus recruit in verses 1-11?

Simon Peter is a blustery braggart who habitually leaps before he looks, talks before he thinks, and bites off more than he can chew.

His brother Andrew is a quiet, unambitious man who is perfectly content to remain in Peter's shadow.

James and John are also brothers. Pushy, hungry for power and glory, and bigoted (especially against Samaritans), they are so loud and hot-headed that Jesus nicknames them the {Mk 3:17} **"Sons of Thunder."**

These fishermen are not rich or poor – just average. They are neither illiterate nor are they well-educated – just average. They are not especially devout or irreligious – just average. And Jesus says to them, *"I choose you."*

- In verses 27-32 Jesus recruits Levi (who is also called Matthew). This man is anything but average. He is rich, super rich, filthy rich.

That is just it: Levi is *filthy* rich, for he is a publican, a tax-collector for the Roman Empire. The taxes he extracts feed, clothe, and arm the Roman armies who defile the Holy Land and crush every effort to win Jewish freedom. Levi is a traitor.

Levi receives no salary; instead, he is authorized to wring out more than the people owe and pocket the difference. Some publicans extort three, four, or five times the district assessment. Levi is a thief. And Jesus says to him, *"I choose you."*

- In Luke 6:12-16 Jesus names twelve apostles. He includes the five disciples we have already met, plus seven others:

① Philip is {Greenhough} **"a plodding, accurate, conscientious... man...with no originality,"** a decent fellow with **"little moral imagination."**

② Bartholomew (also named Nathanael) is a snob. The first time he heard of Jesus he scoffed, {Jn 1:46} **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"**

③ Thomas is known as "the Doubter." He has trouble taking things on faith.

④ James son of Alphaeus is "James the Obscure." The only thing we know about him is his name.

⑤ Simon the Zealot is prepared not only to die for his faith, but to kill for it. He would almost rather murder a tax-collector than redeem him.

⑥ Judas son of James is also named Thaddeus. The Gospels record one thing he said, that's it.

⑦ Judas Iscariot {Jn 12:6} is an embezzler who will betray Jesus to death.

The few of these guys who stand out do so mainly for their failures. And Jesus says to them, *"I choose you."*

So it is with us. The apostle Paul might as well have been talking to us when he wrote, {1 Co 1:26-29, TNIV}

think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things...to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things ... and the despised

things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Thank God that he chooses people like us!

✦ That *Christ does the choosing* is remarkable. So is *whom he chooses*. The third remarkable thing about these episodes is *the mission to which he calls them*.

¶ In his parallel account of the selection of the Twelve, Mark adds some vital details. Mark 3:14-15: Jesus “[designates] **them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.**”

The apostolic mission has three parts: presence, proclamation, and purification.

☆ As for presence, Jesus chooses the Twelve **“that they might be with him.”**

It is because they are with Jesus that the fishermen see who he is, Peter is moved to repentance, and all four leave their former lives behind in order to follow him.

It is because Levis is with Jesus that he leaves his tax booth and his corrupt and predatory way of life **“and [follows] him.”**

Presence is listed first because Jesus is at the center. Being with him is fundamental. Move him off to the side and nothing we do has lasting value.

Until his Second Coming we will not be with the Lord Jesus in the flesh. Yet we can be with him in other ways, through the Holy Spirit and through prayer, worship, and engagement with his Word. These are not legalistic obligations we are compelled to fulfill;

they are life-giving opportunities to be with Jesus and we are blessed to be given them.

☆ As for proclamation, Jesus chooses the Twelve **“that he might send them out to preach.”**

Their message is the Good News of the kingdom: that it has been established in Christ Jesus; that he became human, lived among us, died, rose, ascended, and will return again; that his kingdom is {Lk 4:18-19} **“good news to the poor...freedom for the prisoners... recovery of sight for the blind... release [for] the oppressed,”** and the outpouring of **“the Lord’s favor”**; and that by his undeserved mercy and kindness we can be reconciled to God and live with him forever in his kingdom.

This is our message, too. We proclaim it non-verbally with deeds of *αγαπε* love, justice and peace; and of course with preaching, teaching, and words of witness.

☆ As for purification, Jesus chooses the Twelve **“to have authority to drive out demons.”**

Demons desecrate the holy, degrade the precious, and uglify the beautiful. Their filthy presence is a form of spiritual and moral pollution.

Christ authorizes his apostles to expel demons and re-sanctify what they have desecrated, re-glorify what they have degraded, and re-beautify what they have made ugly. It is an integral part of the Gospel.

Demons still exist and we, too, are called to battle them. They aren’t generally as brash in 21st century North America as they were in ancient times;

more often they work behind the scenes, manipulating systems and institutions to do their dirty work for them.

○ Either way, our weapons are the same ones the apostles used: {Eph 6:14-18} **“truth...righteousness... the gospel of peace... faith... salvation...the word of God...and [prayer].”**

“I choose you.” That is what the Son of God said to the Twelve long ago, and that is what he is saying to you and me in this moment: I choose you to be with me; I choose you to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; I choose you to purify that which has been contaminated. *“I choose you.”*

We are free to say “No!” to him.

We are equally free to say “Yes! I will follow you.”

Which will it be?