

Second Sunday in Christmas/January 3, 2021
Ephesians 1:3-6/Chosen By God
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...”

Today in the third day of the year 2021 God speaks to us of an eternal mystery, of a choice once made for us. Just as we did not choose to be born to live on into the third millennium this day, we did not choose to follow Christ as true God, but he chose us to be His people before the beginning of time.

Along the lines of choice there is a great misunderstanding in much of Christianity today about how salvation occurs. By grace alone, we agree, but how does it come to us? Many people believe God provides salvation in Jesus Christ, but we must choose to believe in Him. This choice idea is found almost everywhere in popular Christianity, from literature to the Promise Keepers, Billy Graham Crusades to the lyrics of many modern Christian songs. The idea is Jesus died for you, but that has no bearing on your life unless you now choose God.

That concern does not strike the apostle Paul as he writes in our text for today, “He, that is God, chose us in him before the creation of the world.” The Bible is much more concerned with God choosing us than us choosing God. Consider John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Did Adam choose to be created? Did Abraham choose to believe in a God he did not know? Did Moses choose to lead the people from Egypt? No, he complained so much God almost had to force him. Did Jonah choose to go to Nineveh? Did Peter choose to follow Christ

when he said to Jesus, “Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man”? Did Paul choose Jesus when he was fell to the ground blind, saying, “Who are you, Lord?” Did you really choose to believe in God? Or, like all of these, did God choose to come to you and cause you to believe in him?

The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 2, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Can someone who is dead choose to come to life again? Can the dog or cat you so loved at one time in life choose to come back to your house and make you happy again? Absurd! It is beyond all reason. No more can we, in the state we held before the Spirit of God came upon us, choose to come to God.

Some will quote Joshua to the people of Israel when he says, [Jos 24:15] “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” But consider where and when in their lives Joshua says this. God already chose them and led them out of Egypt. He now asks them if they will choose to continue to remain with the Lord, or if they will fall away from him and worship false gods.

The Scripture is true and its emphasis is clear. God chose us. In His infinite wisdom, He looked ahead across the ages and chose us to believe in him. That is for our comfort, to know it is not mere chance we are believers in Christ. This is why St. Paul writes, “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.” If you believe in Jesus as your savior, then God willed it. All glory be to him! God reached through the depths of darkness and ignorance, across the millennia of time and into our lives and touched us.

What is the purpose of God choosing? Paul writes, [2 Thes 2:13-14] “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God chose us to share in his glory.

That is why we were taught the work of the Holy Spirit as confessed in the Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in God or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith.”

Though at times it may seem most of Christianity around us has missed this point, we must not think that it is not important. We may feel this should not be a point of contention in Christianity, interrupting fellowship in the Christian church. Not only does the choice of God bring us peace, but it keeps the credit where credit is due, all to Jesus. God chose to come down into the world. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. His work was to offer his holy life as the total payment for all disobedience to God. His work was complete, perfect. To say we must now choose to believe in Jesus on our own is to say what He did was not enough. This takes away from Christ, and is a departure from salvation by grace alone.

We honor God when we admit if we were left on our own, we would always choose evil. But since He chose us from eternity, and came into our lives to reveal the savior, and aided by the Holy Spirit, we are now to choose the good from the bad.

One warning, we are not to question whether God’s choices are fair. Why He chooses some and not others. We don’t have God’s perspective. We don’t know why, and we should not speak for him.

We do know God loves all, and we know why people are saved. God so loved the whole world, that He gave his only begotten Son.

There are choices to be made. God already made the big choices. We must make the little choices. Guidance by the Holy Spirit leads us to choose life, closeness to God, peaceful upright lives that are of service to all people.

God chose to come down and live among us. He came as a baby and lived among us in poverty, in order to die in our place, take our guilt away before the heavenly Father, and give us the riches of eternal life in heaven. That should make a big difference in our choices.

God wants us to use the good life he gives us to his advantage. He gives you the power of how you will spend your time, use your money, and spread your love. Further the kingdom of God. Be a champion of peace and justice. Demonstrate to those around you what it means to be a person chosen by God in acts of care and compassion.

I can leave you today with no better words than of St. Peter's first letter to the church: [1 Pet 1:18-21] "...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

God chose Christ to be your redeemer. God chose you to belong to him and carry you into the new heavens and the new earth.