

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church**

**May 17, 2009**

**“God’s Chosen”**

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***Psalm 98***

*A Psalm.*

<sup>1</sup>*O sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have gained him victory.*

<sup>2</sup>*The LORD has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.*

<sup>3</sup>*He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.*

*All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.*

<sup>4</sup>*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.*

<sup>5</sup>*Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.*

<sup>6</sup>*With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.*

<sup>7</sup>*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.*

<sup>8</sup>*Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy*

<sup>9</sup>*at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.*

***John 15:9-17***

<sup>9</sup>*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

*12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

William Willimon once asked a man in his congregation, "How did you decide to marry your wife?" Without great thought the man answered, "To be quite frank, I had asked a number of women to marry me. She was the only one who ever said yes." Perhaps that isn't the best rationale for such a decision!

I recall a day long ago when at the end of the school day I waited outside Amelia's elementary school to take her home. What I saw and heard brought back some horrible childhood memories. Some children were preparing to play a game of kickball. Before the actions started, they had to choose sides. Two rather strong personalities declared themselves to be captains and everyone else lined up like obedient sheep. The stronger, more athletic-looking boys were chosen first. Then a couple of well dressed, attractive little girls were chosen by the captains. Finally, all that were left were a couple of small children, only somewhat bigger than the kickball itself. It was apparent that neither captain wanted them, in fact one of the selectors even offered to give them both to the other team. But eventually each team reluctantly agreed to take one of the leftover girls and the game began.

I remember that day because I remembered well what it was like to be the last one chosen. It was worst than a humbling experience. It was humiliating. After all, who wanted a skinny kid with glasses on their team? He doesn't look like he can play the game very well. Besides, he kicks with his left foot!

The other night Maren and I were taking inventory of the songs stored on my Ipod. I played for her a bit of one of my favorites, Janis Ian's classic from the 1970's, a song called *At Seventeen*. Maren was moved by the lyrics, "for those of us who knew the pain of Valentine's that never came, and those whose names were never called when choosing sides for basketball."

It is somewhat easy for us to see that the ability to choose gives one a certain power in life. We live in a culture that seems to think that choice is a defining characteristic of what it means to be human. The power to choose helps us think that we have a bit of control over the forces of the world. Choices determine the course of life, and those who have power and money and knowledge seem to have more choices.

It might be harder for us to understand the importance we place upon being chosen. Like the children standing in line for a game of kickball, we want to be chosen. We don't want to be the last one selected. We jump up and down screaming, "Pick me! Choose me!" We measure our worth by being needed, valued, and chosen. We want to be loved and a great deal of our lives is consumed with frantic activity that will perhaps make us worthy enough to be chosen by another.

In the recent National Football League draft, cameras followed closely the big, strong young men who expected to be chosen by a professional team early in the selection process, only to be ignored until later. They uncomfortably sweated it out while their reputations and millions of dollars drained away. In the NFL, they even have a name for that last person chosen- he is Mr. Irrelevant.

In the gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples of God's love for them. He speaks of bearing fruit, of abiding in his love, and of loving each other as he has first loved them. He closes his mini-sermon with these words, "You did not chose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."

I chose you. I am struck by the power of that simple phrase. I chose you. The truth of God's love is this: life is not about our determination and frantic efforts to be loved and to be chosen by God. God has already loved and chosen us. Life is about recognizing God's grace that already is with us and sharing of that grace with others.

Sportswriter Rick Reilly wrote a book about the relationship between golfer Tiger Woods and his late father Earl. Earl referred to his son as "the chosen one." He used the term not because of Tiger's golfing prowess, but because Tiger was his son from his second marriage. Earl had largely ignored his children from a previous marriage because of work and personal obligation. He vowed that things would be different with Tiger, that he would spend more time with him, that he would always be a part of his life. The chosen one had nothing to do with skill or victory. It only had to do with relationship.

That is what Jesus tells us today. He reminds us that no matter who we are and what we have accomplished, it is God who has first chosen us. God's love for us is not dependent upon our own love, our own talent, our own accomplishment, or our own goodness. God's love is God's choice. We are the chosen ones. It is God who reaches out to us, who declares us to be worthy, and who chooses us to be followers.