

**“I Chose You”**

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16).*

Every day, in every way, you are judged by what you do. From the moment we become aware of rewards and punishments, we always have an eye on performance. It is absolutely the way of the world and we experience it every day. If you want a good grade on the test, then you have to study. If you want a part in the musical, then you have to give to have a good audition. If you want more playing time, then you have to practice well. If you want a promotion, then you need a good performance review. Top to bottom, beginning to end, this is the way the world works. You are measured by your merits, and you're chosen because of what you've done.

But this morning, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, today, the world's system of rewards gets turned on its head. Today, at Emmanuel, we will experience The Rite of Confirmation, and unlike a graduation or awards ceremony, confirmation is not something you earn and there's no such thing as a confirmation honors diploma. Today, there will be no certificates for perfect church attendance, no memory work awards will be bestowed, and, luckily, for some of you, confirmation isn't based on the quantity or quality of the sermon reports you turned in this year.

Today, we are not here to honor you for something that you've done. Instead, we are here today to celebrate what God has done *for you* because, the truth is, you could have never done it for yourself. In the words spoken at your Baptism, the pastor proclaimed, “We are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation.” This stern statement was spoken about you before most of you could even speak for yourselves and yet, we need to consider these words because they describe a problem that applies to every one of us.

You see, on our own, we are separated from God. The sin we were born into and the sins we have committed since have severed the connection to our Creator and the fact is that we can't begin to repair the damage sin has caused. No matter how hard we work and no matter how much we do or how well we do it, the rupture in our relationship with God is something we cannot fix. That's exactly what Martin Luther said in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed when he wrote, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in my Lord Jesus Christ or come to Him...” And this disquieting confession from Luther tells us that not only are we unable to fix the problems created by sin, we can't even make ourselves believe in the One who has. And that is why your Baptism matters.

In today's reading from John, Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” and these words from Jesus were made very personal in your Baptism. You see, in your Baptism, God acted in your life. He connected you to the death and resurrection of Jesus. He forgave your sins and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit; He marked you with His name and, with water and the Word, God chose you. And this divine choice was not made because you were good enough, or worked hard enough, or had some spark of faith in your heart. God chose you solely because of His love for you in Christ Jesus.

This is what we celebrate today. On our own, you and I were lost, with no eyes to see and no power to change, “but” – just as the Pastor proclaimed on the day of your Baptism – “the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sin of the whole world, that whoever

believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Faith in this promise of God is what you will confess today, and this promise of God makes all the difference.

Over the last few weeks, our elders and pastors personally interviewed each one of our confirmands and, as we met with them to talk about their faith and the vows they will speak today, it was clear that these young people are already dealing with many of the same practical worries and spiritual concerns that plague all of us. And even as they stand ready to make a public confession of the faith into which they were Baptized, their lives are anything but victorious. They have doubts. They have fears. They are dealing with failures and sins, and – just like the rest of us – they already have a profound understanding of how short they’ve fallen. And this is why the words of our Gospel reading are so fitting today.

You see, Jesus spoke these words to the disciples on the night before His crucifixion. These were people who had seen Jesus do amazing miracles and had listened to Him teach; who had witnessed His compassion and been awed by His power, and if there was ever a group that should have been strong in their commitment to Christ it was these disciples. And yet Jesus knew them, *just as He knows us*, and He knew that soon they would be scattered and He would be betrayed; that soon He would be arrested and tried, beaten and crucified, and that these men would leave Him when He needed them the most. They were about to undergo a vicious attack from Satan and all of their best efforts and good intentions were going to fail them. And on the edge of such intense temptation and immense uncertainty, Jesus spoke to them with words of assurance. He promised them that no matter how dark the path would get, and no matter how desperate things would appear, He loved them and had chosen them. And, my friends, this is the same promise that Jesus is making to you today!

This weekend in your confirmation, it is not your vows that we celebrate as much as it is God’s promise to you in Jesus. This promise is true for every one of us and it is affirmed again and again in the confirmation verses you have chosen for this day! Today, in these verses, God has promised He will make your paths straight, and today, He has promised you that He will never leave you or forsake you. Today, He promised that you have been redeemed and that God is your refuge and strength; that He will help you and uphold you and will supply all your needs; and today, God has promised you that He will be with you wherever you go and that no one will take your crown. Today, in these verses God has confirmed His promise to you!

In our Gospel reading from John 15 Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is God’s promise to you and because God has chosen you in Christ Jesus, your life matters! It began in your Baptism when the Holy Spirit called you by the Gospel; it is being strengthened as you grow through His Word; it is confirmed each time you confess your sins and receive God’s forgiveness; and it will bear much fruit as you live out your faith in the midst of a sinful world. And this life that God has given to you in Jesus will never end.

According to the world, you will always be measured by your merits and chosen by what you do. But according to the Word of God, the only thing that matters is what Christ has done for you, and today, you have the promise of Jesus that He has chosen you for life. Go in the peace of this promise God has confirmed for you today, and all God’s people say, “Amen.”

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