

“Predestined to Election”

“For those who he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Romans 8:29a.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, and now am found, was blind but now I see.

Good morning! I have never thought much about election and salvation because I believe in the goodness and justice of God. Paul and the series of lessons that we have had recently have led me to speak about election today. I do so, with the hope that you and I can share the mystery of election together. Jeremiah was told by God, *“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you.”* Jeremiah 1:5. Paul felt that double election was God’s prerogative in Romans when he said, *“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ So it depends not upon man’s will or execution, but upon God’s mercy.”* Romans 9:14-17. I really do not understand why some persons are chosen to lead and others are not. And, I have difficulty believing that God would damn some without giving them a choice of salvation. But I do believe this, certainly God does not see as humans see. Therefore, I invite you this morning to walk with me through the mystery of election.

I. Jacob the Supplanter-Genesis 29:15-28

Jacob, the heel-grabbing, birthright usurping and blessing stealing son of Issac and Rebekah, was elected by God to fulfill the covenant promise made to Abraham. In today’s lesson, he has fled to Paddan-aram, the home of his maternal uncle Laban to search for a wife. The reader also knows that Rebekah sent him away because she feared for his life. Rebekah also has had enough harassment from Esau’s foreign wives. She wants none of that from any future wife of Jacob. At Paddan-aram, Jacob has encountered Rachel the younger daughter of Laban, gotten her consent to marry and is about to pop the question to her father Laban.

Rachel had alluring eyes, a clear and fair complexion and the grace and beauty that any sultan would offer a thousand camels or a half of his kingdom for. *“Sir,”* Jacob said, *“I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”* Genesis 29:18. Old Laban, sitting in his tent with his legs crossed and twirling his moustache, cleared his throat and responded, *“It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man, stay with me.”* Genesis 29: 19. With a song in his heart for the next seven years, Jacob kept Laban’s flocks and worked on the huge estate. Occasionally, he would see the lovely Rachel but only at social functions and family gatherings, and then only briefly. Finally, the seven years were completed and young Jacob went to Rachel’s father Laban to receive her hand in marriage.

Jacob said to Laban, *“Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.”* Genesis 29:21. Old Laban, drew smoke into his lungs and exhaled as he cleared his throat. Motioning to his servants, he instructed them to prepare a feast. At the festival, Laban had

his elder daughter Leah all veiled in her Arabian finest to go into the bridal suite. Jacob went in to her that night. All went as expected, but come morning, Jacob, the heel-grabber, birthright usurper and blessing stealer found that he had been “out Jacobed” to coin a phrase. It wasn’t his beautiful Rachel he had been with all night but the near sighted Leah, the elder daughter.

Feeling betrayed Jacob said to his father-in-law, “*What is this that you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?*” Genesis 29:25. [Oh, said Laban, did you not know?] “*This is not done in our country-giving the younger before the first born. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.*” Genesis 29:26-27. Jacob agreed. Then when the next seven years were completed, Laban gave Jacob his younger daughter Rachel to wed. Although God had a lot of work to do, God had elected Jacob to be the covenant heir of Abraham and Isaac and nothing seemed to have stood in the way.

II. All Things Work Together for Good-Romans 8:26-39

Paul too believed that one could not always directly correlated earthly blessings with God’s election. Paul was dealing with a group of Christians who were experiencing or about to experience persecution. Nero wanted to rebuild parts of Rome, the Jews would soon be driven out of Jerusalem, Christians were being pushed out of the synagogue and the lives of all of the religious were being threatened. Against this background, Paul started with a discussion on prayer. We do not always know what to pray for, consequently the Spirit of God “*intercedes*” for us “*with sighs too deep for words.*” The spirit knows what is in our minds and hearts. God knows what is in the mind of the Spirit and the spirit knows all of our needs.

In the answers to their prayers, Paul said, “*All things works together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to God’s purpose.*” Romans 8:28. Bad things happen, set backs occur, but in the end, if you love and obey God, God will work it out for good. Jacob wasn’t a very good person. He made a lot of mistakes, but God had elected him for a special purpose. In the end, God investment in Jacob was not unfounded.

Election or being specially selected by God is a mysterious thing like so many mysteries of our faith. God has foreknowledge of those he wanted and wants to be conformed to the image of Christ-an Abraham not Haran, a Isaac not Ishmael, a Jacob not an Esau, a David not any of his seven older brothers, a Judah not a Reuben, an Isaiah, an Amos, a Jesus of Nazareth or the next priest to be selected at St. Barnabas. These he puts into a right relationship with himself. These God glorifies. Out of all the mistakes that Jacob made, God on at least four occasion covenanted with him and makes him worthy to stand before him to carry out his work. God can do the same with each of us!

Paul then went on to say that “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” God loved us so much that God let God’s Son die for us. If that is the case then, the Romans should not worry about whether or not God will sustain them under persecution. They should seek only to lead a holy life, witness to the truth and stand up for what was right.

It is God who judges and justifies, who can condemn? It is Christ who died and was resurrected for them, who then can destroy them? Christ draws them unto himself, therefore hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or even the sword

cannot separate them from God. They should not be unduly worried. Neither should we.

In his final admonition Paul said, “Nothing on earth or in heaven can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Many during the Roman persecutions kept the faith and witnessed boldly and finally, Constantine ended the persecutions and made Christianity licit in the Roman empire. The Church survived and spread throughout the world. You and I like Jacob and many of the Roman Christians are called to be children of God, joint heirs of his kingdom with Jesus Christ and missionary to the world. As you and I seek to witness to the truth to our faith and God’s goodness, we too must have the faith to believe that God in Christ has elected us, will sustain us and that nothing can separate us for the love of God in Christ Jesus.

III. The Kingdom of Heaven Like a Mustard Seed-Matthew-13:31-33,44-52

What is this kingdom of Heaven like to which we have been called to which we are elected? The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed’s growth. It starts imperceptibly small like a tiny seed, then grows into a mighty shrub. It’s growth is like yeast in a lump of dough, it triples in size. It is like an alluring hidden treasure for which a person will sell all that she/he has in order to acquire it. It is like a precious pearl that a diver would search the seven seas to find. And, it is all encompassing like a drag net thrown into the sea that brings in a large draft of fish.

In these parables about the kingdom, no doubt, Calvin understood that Jesus implied choice of the kind of soil we can become; choice in the patience required for the slow growth of God’s kingdom within us; choice in a kind of leaven-in-a-lump-of-dough faith that bring us hope in the midst of life’s trials; choice in the persistence of seeking and searching for the rewards of the greater life; and choice in the all encompassing casting our nets into God’s vast ocean of divine goodness for the richness of life here and in the age to come. Certainly John Calvin knew and strongly advocated for Christian piety as a response to God’s salvation and election. God’s love and God’s justice would never let anyone be damned because of God’s sovereignty. And as incorrigible as Jacob seemed to have been, he in his own way said yes to God’s election. He, therefore, received and passed on the blessing of Abraham. You and I have the same choice.

Wherever and whenever the age to come will be, I believe with all my heart that there will be a heaven and a hell. There will be a separation of the wheat from the tares. The fruit from bad seed will be burned with unquenchable fire. Bad fish will be cast upon the shores of hell to decay. And, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, outside the wedding banquet hall, in the highways and byways and in places of utter darkness by those who take election and salvation as a matter of entitlement. That is the other side of Calvin’s double predestination. But the Calvinist among us must understand that Calvin believed firmly in free will also-that each of us does has a choice. The Rev. Robert McClelland, a Presbyterian theologian told me, “*You have to understand two things about John Calvin: First, He was a rational thinking lawyer. And secondly, he was a systematic theologian who sought to balance his theology against his detractors and to defend the faith against Thomism.*”

Jesus’ final challenge in today’s lessons is through the disciples to us. He explained the role of those who would be leading the righteous-“*Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his*

treasure what is new and what is old.” Matthew 13:52. We have to ask this morning, what is it that is new and what is old? What should St. Barnabas hold on to and what should be discarded? What stands in the way of the next selection of your future priest? Many are called but only the willing are chosen. Will you with God’s help choose wisely? That was the challenge to Jacob, to the Roman Christians and the Jewish religious leaders of the First Century. It is also our challenge in the church today.

Finally, Matthew summarized the success that Jesus had throughout the regions. Matthew ended with the fact that Jesus could do no mighty works there. Let those who have ears to hear the word of God this morning. Many are called, but only the willing are chosen. This is the word of the lord! Thanks be to God!

Let us pray. O God who sent your Son Jesus to redeem the world, we pray for your special grace and insight that each of us may respond positively to your call and election. We pray also that you will give the vestry, profile committee and calling committee the insight and wisdom to listen carefully and to choose wisely. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.