

You didn't choose me but I chose you

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Easter 6 b – Jn 15 9-17 Acts 10 44-48

Jesus said, *You didn't choose me but I chose you.* ^{Jn 15.16} It's easy to lose sight of that – I/you didn't choose him; he chose me/you. It's quite confronting. I understand it to mean that Jesus acted to take hold of you and me before we even knew about him. It's disconcerting enough to have our children flexing their independence and doing things without permission; it's positively unnerving to have our God doing it too! Say goodbye to a comfortable, domesticated God!

This means that our faith is about choosing to respond to God – getting on board with initiatives that God calls us to; accepting the outstretched hand of God. It also means that if we walk out on the Church, it won't make Jesus give up on you or me. Remember, *he chose us!* What we might do for Jesus won't cause him to respond to us in love; he loves us anyway. Whatever we do, to please him or to cross him, his love for us is there. It never wavers. It's just *there*; and that's the force which can nourish and grow you and me into a people who are a blessing for the world.

Today's reading from the book of Acts shows the earliest Church discovering that Jesus chooses people they never expected. They're amazed; people who aren't Jewish are given the Holy Spirit. *You didn't choose me; I chose you.* We don't often think about Jesus calling the shots; even less that he does it in such dramatic ways. We're not used to dreams and visions and angels being part of our decision-making processes. We tend to make fun of that – to say it's how fundamentalists think. We tend not to trust people who claim a

special relationship with God.

Such misgivings can colour how we read scripture. If you take some today's Gospel verses ^(10,14 & 16) out of context and read them literally, you might see a protection racket; *Jesus saying something like* ¹⁰ *Do what I say, and you'll be okay;* ¹⁴ *I'll like you if you play by my rules;* ¹⁶ *Hang around with me, and I'll see you do well out of it.'* Looks pretty worrying, doesn't it. Someone who knew nothing else about Jesus, flipping open the Bible at this page, would probably balk at it. But they needn't.

How would *you* help someone understand this Gospel passage? How would *you* open it up as *good* news for them? We've each been charged with doing just that. Personally, I usually start by looking at context. It always explains a lot.

The immediate context of this passage is the verses we read last week – *I am the true vine*. We're reading through Jesus' farewell to his disciples before he's crucified. He's giving them a message of a choice for love and friendship. When he talks of commandments, his command is to love like he does. And his master-servant relationship with his disciples, it's laid aside, as he offers us his friendship.

He's telling us about building a community of love, where the only measure of a relationship is the law of love. Keeping *that* law builds community that's safe for all who belong to it, and any newcomer. We think only Jesus can create something so wonderful, yet today we hear him asking *us* to embody his creativity and trustworthiness. So when Jesus talks about *us* asking something in *his* name, ^{v.16 c} he trusts that *we'll* ask what *he'd* ask – that *we'll* be loving like *he's* loving.

This looks back to last week when we heard Jesus tell us he's the vine and we're the branches. As his branches, it's natural that *we'll* genuinely express his care – particularly for the

frail, the frightened and the needy. He's chosen *them*. And we are his representatives, called to express his care for them.

As Christ's branches, we are to reach out and provide hope and shelter and sweet refreshment in their season. Just as he reached out to us and grafted us onto him, we are to offer this belonging to others too – to offer without condition a connection, through Christ the vine – offer them connection with the true source their being, with a true reason for being. But like any branch, we can only draw the strength to do all of that from the vine; Jesus, the true vine.

That's quite a bit of context, but it all helps to build bridges of unbreakable, free belonging. It helps us and all who hear this Gospel to know that his call to us, his way of love, his kindness and understanding can bring to a broken world the healing and peace of faith, hope and love – new life; true life. Amen