

Our text for this morning's message is Acts 1:12-26 and the title of this message is "God has chosen you!" To be chosen is to belong. Every single one of us has this built-in, God-given desire to belong; to be included with someone, or something, somewhere.

"A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people," says Brené Brown, a researcher, storyteller, professor, lecturer, author, and podcast host. Ms. Browne continues: "We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We are numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick."

How does it feel **not** to belong, to be the one **not** chosen, the one who is **left out**? I think we'd all agree it's not a good feeling, to say the least. "Not belonging is a terrible feeling," says Phoebe Stone, a popular children's author. She continues: "It feels awkward and it hurts, as if you were wearing someone else's shoes"

Whether it's for a team, a job, a club membership, or some other activity, to be the one that's **not** chosen, to be left out, to not belong, can be one of the saddest and most embarrassing events in our life. We end up feeling rejected and unaccepted.

In our reading today from the book of Acts, we hear the account of two men who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. Their names are Justus and Matthias. They were up for consideration as the one to replace Judas as the twelfth disciple. When it came time for the choice to be made, the one who was chosen was Matthias, and Justus was left out. Oh yes, Justus knew the feeling of rejection, of not being chosen for this position. And there is a part of us that can relate to Justus, "the unchosen" one.

Somebody was needed to replace Judas as the twelfth disciple after Judas betrayed Jesus and took his own life. The apostles were gathered together during those ten days between Jesus' ascension, which the Christian church celebrated this past Thursday, and Pentecost, which is coming up next Sunday. The apostles did not know when that outpouring

of the Holy Spirit was going to come, but they did understand that to carry out the Great Commission Jesus had given them before He ascended, they would need to be at full strength—twelve strong. So, the other Christians considered two men for the job—Justus and Matthias. Both men were qualified. Both had experience. Both had served faithfully. Both were deserving of the honor. Both were loved by God. They were both good men, but only one could be chosen for this position.

After casting lots, equivalent to our drawing straws, Matthias was chosen. Today, Matthias is remembered as a saint. He has his own special day on the church calendar: February 24 is celebrated as St. Matthias Day. In fact, he is described in one of the verses of the hymn we will sing during the offering today.

And Justus? He drops out of sight. After this account in Scripture, he is never heard from or heard about again. And today he's pretty much completely forgotten. Being forgotten is what often happens when you're the one not chosen. You're sometimes forgotten, ignored, or considered a nobody.

I can't help but wonder how Justus felt that day. He was qualified. He was experienced. He was deserving. One hundred and twenty of his fellow Christians said he was eligible, but Matthias got the job. How did that feel, to be the "unchosen one"? To have them say, "No, Justus, not you, but Matthias." Justus even knew that *God* had caused the lot to fall where it did. God chose Matthias rather than him. I'll bet that hurt.

I imagine most of us can feel for Justus, because we all want to be the one chosen. Sinfully and selfishly, sometimes, we want to be the favorite, the best dressed, the most congenial, the most likely to succeed. We want to be loved, admired, appreciated, and complimented. We want to be the one chosen for honors, awards, teams, prizes, and promotions. Many of us would like to be number one. Perhaps that sinful desire was a cause of Judas's betrayal of Jesus.

But in the world, we can't ***all*** make it to the top. The base of a pyramid is much bigger than the top. A large company had an opening for 5 management positions; 1,500 people wanted the job and applied for it.

But only 5 were selected. As a result, that meant 1,495 were not chosen.

Justus has a lot of company today.

Often, there's no consolation prize. Ricky Bobby, a character in a comedy movie once said, "If you ain't first, you're last." In fact, just the term "consolation prize" reminds us that when we're not chosen for whatever the big prize is, we need to be consoled.

Every one of us is at times the "unchosen one." We can identify with Justus all too easily. The "unchosen ones" exist everywhere: the ones who didn't have enough skill to make the team; the ones who didn't get the promotion or the new job; the ones who didn't earn get the big college scholarship.

However, whether or not the world has chosen us for any special honors or awards, God by grace has chosen us to be His sons and daughters. To be chosen by God's grace is the greatest recognition or award in life. And know this, "God has chosen you!"

Time after time, God's Word remind us of that. One of my favorite verses from Ephesians says, 'God **chose** us in Christ, before the creation of

the world to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Ephesians 1:4). In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah wrote down these words from God, “‘You are my servant, I have **chosen** you and not cast you off’; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is 41:9–10). Jesus told His disciples and, by extension, us, “You did not choose me, but **I chose you** and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (Jn 15:16).

By Jesus’ death on the cross, God shows us that in spite of our sins we are very special to Him. We are extremely important to Him. We are the chosen ones who are loved, forgiven, and saved by His grace. By the Holy Spirit, we are placed on God’s spiritual team, the Church. I like how Nicky Gimbel, an Anglican priest and author puts it: “Church is not an organization you join; it is a **family** where you belong, a home where you are loved, and a hospital where you find healing.” Here, God brings you into His family through Holy Baptism. Here He lovingly builds you up and

nourishes you through His Word. And Here He graciously invites you to come to His Holy Table, where together we receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Here in His house, we receive the best spiritual care and healing God has to offer on earth!

You are one of God's chosen ones, and that is something wonderful indeed! Imagine you're at a large gathering of people, awaiting the arrival of an important guest. Everyone's standing around, looking at the door for the special guest to come. Finally, he arrives. All eyes are suddenly on him. He seems so knowledgeable, so energetic, and so electric in his personality. You would love to speak to him, if only for a short time. Everyone in the crowded room is thinking the same thing. Now the guest's eyes scan the room, searching. Suddenly, his eyes stop, he smiles, and he walks over to you. He extends his hand and introduces himself. You, of all the people in the room, have been chosen for his special recognition. Imagine your joy and excitement!

Words spoken to us can make a big difference in our lives. A coach says, "You made the team." A teacher tells us, "You are an outstanding

student.” A beloved whispers to us, “I love you.” In the words spoken to us at our Baptism, God says to us, “You are my child. I forgive your sins. You are now a part of my family of faith.” We, too, know the power of God’s words. Each one of us is one of His chosen ones. When Martin Luther was tempted to put himself down or feel depressed, he reminded himself of his Baptism, which made him a ***child*** of God.

So, whenever you or I feel unchosen, unwanted, or unloved, we can remind ourselves that our value in God’s eyes is not determined by how many teams we’re on, how many awards we’ve won, how much money or possessions we have, or by how others view us. On the contrary, our worth is given to us by God, who made us in His image and saves us by His grace. Never forget and never doubt that in Christ, you are one of God’s beloved, forgiven children. He has chosen you! Amen.