
Why Are We Chosen?

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 14 June 2026

Romans 5:1-8 • Matthew 9:35-10:15



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The Lord works in mysterious ways — you may have heard this! Day to day brings new examples, as things we don't expect to happen, or to work out well, turn out for the good. You get turned down for a job and then find a better one. The person you least expect to help you in a time of trouble turns out to be a true friend. And we see this also in the people that God chooses to be his servants.

In our Gospel today Jesus is sending out his disciples, and what a mixed group it is. We have Matthew, the tax-collector. Tax-collectors were hated at the time because they often collected more than they should. The Emperor demanded a certain total sum from each collector, and he didn't care how the collector got it. So if the collector could get more from each person, it made his job easier. Plus, anything extra he collected was his to keep. It was a system which seemed designed for fraud. The collector was also hated just for working with

the occupying government. Why would God choose such a person to go out in the service of the kingdom?

We have Simon of Canaan, who was reportedly a Zealot. To us, a zealot is someone who shows great enthusiasm, or zeal, for something. But Zealots with a capital Z were a group of rebels, working for the overthrow of the Emperor and his government. Is this the kind of person to go out as a humble representative of our Lord? And how would such a person get on with Matthew, the representative of the hated government? One would not expect them to work together well in the same cause. “Think what it must have been to have a collaborator with the Romans side by side with a Zealot, dedicated to the ousting of the Romans!”¹ It would hardly make for good teamwork.

Then, of course, we have Judas Iscariot, specifically identified as “the one who betrayed him” (Matthew 10:4). At the time, his future betrayal was known only to Jesus. God would select him to betray Jesus; here he selects him to carry his Gospel to the people. According to John, Judas was always dishonest; “he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6). John also wrote that Judas did not care about the poor. If this was the way he was, one would hardly think that he would put much effort into bringing news of hope to distressed people.

And then, several of the disciples were fishermen. Fishing was an honourable profession — no problem there. But were fisherman typically well-spoken or persuasive? Were they people who would be listened to? Would not an orator or someone with good pastoral skills be a better fit for this job? On the other hand, the disciples were going to the common people, and fishermen would understand and know the kinds of lives they lived. Perhaps they went to the fishing communities along the shoreline, and talked to the people they knew.

This is a good thought. Jesus told the disciples to avoid the Gentiles and the Samaritans, and “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6). It’s much easier to talk to people of your own kind, isn’t it? This is a lesson for us. If we are to bring more people to a knowledge of Christ, we do well to start with the people we know, with whom we have many things in common. It is surely a challenge for those of European descent to go as missionaries to Asian countries — that is challenging work. Jesus doesn’t ask us all to do that. Jesus does ask us to spread the work in our own communities, and surely his sending out of these plain fishermen is an example to follow.

So in looking at those Jesus chose to send out into the harvest, the harvest of souls, he made some unusual choices. Later, he made perhaps the most unusual and frankly unpromising choice to spread his Gospel: the apostle Paul, who

¹ Brueggemann, et al, *Texts for Preaching - Year A* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p370.

had been a persecutor and a scourge of the new followers of Christ. He persecuted and arrested many new Christians and brought them in to the authorities, where they were likely tortured and/or killed for their beliefs. In Acts we learn that, after Peter and others began preaching in Jerusalem and winning followers to the new faith, “Saul (Paul) began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Later, he was

still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

This was when the Lord caught him, on the road to Damascus. We all know this story, of the blinding light and the voice of Jesus calling Paul to his new mission, that of carrying the Gospel to the world. But what a man to choose! If ever there was an unworthy vessel for the Lord’s purpose, it would be Paul.

So it is clear that the Lord doesn’t always make the obvious choices for his servants. When I think about this, it gives me hope, for few of us are ideal servants, and none of us is perfect. I was chosen after half a lifetime of not believing in God, of not caring about God’s church; indeed, of speaking against it as nonsense. And I know I am not alone among God’s servants for feeling rather unworthy of the selection. But he did choose me, and sent me off to a far distant and beautiful land to preach to the natives I found there. It makes me feel humble, and cautious about speaking out against others whose Christianity I may doubt. For God may choose anyone to serve him and further his goal of the establishment of the kingdom. We all may do our part, and all our parts are important to God. Let us be ready, then, to respond when God calls on us; and be certain that God will give us the ability to serve him as he chooses. Thanks be to God. Amen.