

Sixth Sunday of Easter (B)

May 9, 2021

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Acts 10: 44-48; Psalm 98; John 15: 9-17

Grace and peace to you from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

A story is told of a 13-year-old boy named Robert Jr. Johnson, affectionately referred to as “RJ.” He lived with his mother, Selena, and his father, Robert, Sr. Just like any teenager, there were moments when RJ would obey his parents and other moments when he would disobey.

The family was preparing for the Christmas holiday. RJ knew that he had to help clean the house prior to guests arriving. This Christmas, RJ was not in agreement. He wanted to use his break the way he wanted to, and that did not include cleaning the house. A few days later, his mother walked around the house and noticed that everything she had asked RJ to clean was clean. With a beaming smile painted on her face, she walked into her bedroom and found a note on her dresser. RJ wrote this letter, and it said:

For cutting the grass - \$20

For cleaning my room - \$15.25

For removing the garbage - \$10

For washing the dishes - \$10.50

For vacuuming the house - \$10

Total Owed: \$65.75

When RJ got home, he found a note from his Mom in his room:

“For the nine months I carried you, holding you inside me - no charge.

For the nights I sat up and doctored and prayed for you - no charge.

For the time and tears and the costs through the years - there is no charge.

For the advice and the knowledge and the costs of your college - no charge...

When you add it all up, the full cost of my love is - no charge.”¹

On the night he would be betrayed, abandoned and denied by his disciples, Jesus tells them that he loves them... Jesus tell them that he calls them friends... Jesus tell them that he had chosen them and trust they will bear fruit by loving others. Jesus tells them, Jesus tells us, that he loves us, Jesus calls us friends and Jesus has chosen us to bear the fruit of love. Jesus declare these truths to twelve who have not shown themselves to

be the sharpest crayons in the box, who argued about which of them the greatest and their reward for following and who would run away as Jesus was wrongly arrested? And we know, with all our flaw, failings and foibles, it's just as wild that Jesus would say to us, too - -- "My dear friends who I love, I have chosen you."

I do not know how many of you remember painfully enduring the tortuous childhood experience of.... choosing teams. Those of you who were fast or talented athletes may not know what I'm speaking about. It happened when you went out to play in the neighborhood or with your cousins or God forbid, in gym class. Two people would be designated captains and would take turns choosing people to be on their team. To be among the first half chosen, put you in a place of honor. The rest of us waited with aches in our bellies, hoping against hope, that we would not have the shame of being the last picked. Participating in the team as the lesser-wanted was also nerve-racking. It was best to sit on the bench where you couldn't miss a play, strike out or lose the game. But the gym teacher would seldom let that happen. Then we last-chosen would spend the class praying no ball ever came our way or that time would be up before we had to take a turn serving or running. Maybe some of you know what I'm talking about. The word's "Let's chose teams," can still bring an involuntary panic to my nervous system.

Here is Jesus saying, "right into our fears and insecurities," "You did not choose me, but I chose you.' 'I chose you,' he says." "I want you on my team."² No hesitation, no pity... just enthusiastic love and friendship saying, "I want you on my team."

"Not last, not least, not grudgingly, not even second, but he chose *you*, Jesus says, as first on his list, he chose *you* to belong to him! What an amazing thing for us to be promised, that even though we don't deserve it, that even though we haven't earned it, that even though we can't always believe it, that he chose you! How precious does that make you? That the Lord of all, the Maker of heaven and earth, the One who was and is and shall be forever has chosen...you to be his own?!"³ Jesus said it to us before he died, as he

hung on the cross, when he resurrected and ascended. He said, “I love you, friend, you’re on my team.”

This is the gospel, my brothers and sisters. Jesus willingly died so that we would know “there is no length to which God will not go to embrace us in love. There is nothing that God would not do to save us through love. There is nothing God will allow to come and remain between us and God’s love. God’s love will conquer. God’s love will prevail. God’s love will win — as Christ’s love is lived and shared and bears fruit in this world --- through you.”⁴ Sit a few seconds in this marvel. You don’t have to worry about your limitations or wonder if you are good enough. *You* are the one Jesus loves. Jesus has chosen *you* to be on his team. *(Pause.)*

Now you may be wondering what we’re to do on this team of Christ’s. Jesus is very clear. Love like I love you. Love one another and “show and tell others they too have been chosen to be on the Lord’s team,”⁵ Show and tell others that Jesus loves them and calls them friends, too. That’s the holy service to which we are called. You see, when Jesus chose us and we go with Jesus, “he insists that we let him bring his friends along. Jesus made it unmistakable that we cannot truly love him and not also love those he loves and those for whom he died.”⁶

That is one of the things Peter was learning in that first lesson we heard from Acts. He was standing in the house of Cornelius, a gentile, Roman centurion, where his family and some other guests had gathered awaiting Peter’s arrival. A place no devote Jew would usually consent to be. The Lord had told Cornelius to send for Peter. In a vision, the Lord told Peter to step over the line between Jew and Gentile and go to Cornelius. Before Peter could even finish giving his witness about Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and the other gentiles. Peter and the first disciples thought the gospel, the love of Jesus and the invitation to be on the team was exclusively intended for fellow Jews... or, at the most, to gentiles who had become Jews and followed all the rules of Judaism. Now, the Lord

was making it very clear ---- “I want everyone to be on my team. I want everyone to know they are my friends and I love them, I died and rose for them, too.”

It's like a parable story that Tony Campolo tells. The story is set in Heaven. St. Peter handles admissions at the pearly gates, according to the story, and the apostle Paul acts like the administrator of the celestial kingdom, taking a monthly census of Heaven's inhabitants.

But something doesn't add up. Each time Paul counts the number of people in Heaven, his number far exceeds the number of admittances that Peter has registered. This discrepancy mystifies them both for quite a while.

Then one day, Paul runs up to Peter and excitedly shouts, “Peter! Peter! I figured out why our numbers don't match. I figured out why there are so many more people in Heaven than you're letting in at the pearly gates. It's Jesus! It's Jesus. He keeps sneaking people over the wall.”⁷

“Jesus offers unlimited grace to all who would trust their lives to him. Jesus died and rose so everyone could be assured of God's love and be on the team. Some days you may say as I do, I don't deserve God's grace. Or, someone I don't like or trust doesn't deserve God's acceptance. Then the gospel spins us around to realize and repent. You and I and “them” are among the very ones Christ sneaks over the wall into God's eternal presence and love. That's what grace, the gospel and the Alleluia of Easter is all about.”⁸ Like those first disciples, we have to continually learn and abide in the Lord's ways and will in which that grace, that gospel and the Alleluia of Easter is for all God's children.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus says. Put aside Hallmark and the peace love of the 1960 hippies. Jesus' kind of love is not about emotions but action. It's not a feeling but act of will. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life.” Jesus' kind of love is generous, compassionate, sacrificial and kind, though it is not cavalier, irresponsible or silly. When we practice Jesus' kind of love, we will have to work to lay down fears, greed, obsessions and prejudices that get in the

way of bringing God's message and love to others. Because Jesus want us to help change the world to be what God desires — a team that crosses all time and space, where each person hears and believes what Jesus told us in his live, death and resurrection: "I love you more than you know, Jesus You are my friend. I have chosen you. Go love as I have loved you and know the peace and joy that passes all understanding." And there's no charge.

Linda M Alessandri 5/8/21

ENDNOTES

1. Searching for source.

2. Reworded from Ryan Mills, "Sixth Sunday of Easter, "May 9, 2021 posted in *04) Johannes / John Beitragende Current (int.)*, English, *Kapitel 15 / Chapter 15, Neues Testament, Predigten / Sermons, Ryan Mills*

3. Ryan Mills, "Sixth Sunday of Easter, "May 9, 2021 posted in *04) Johannes / John Beitragende Current (int.)*, English, *Kapitel 15 / Chapter 15, Neues Testament, Predigten / Sermons, Ryan Mills*

4. Jeffery Gaustad, as posted on Luther Seminary's [God Pause](#) on May 7, 2021.

5. Rewording of sentence by Duane Steele, in his sermon, "We Don't Choose All Our Friends" as posted on www.day1.org on May 4, 1997.

6. credited to Dr. Peter Storey by Bishop L. Bevel Jones in his sermon, "Faith, Friendship, and Fruitfulness" as posted on www.day1.org on May 25, 2003.

7. Tony Campolo, [Letters to a Young Evangelical](#) NY: Perseus Books Group, 2006, pp. 49-50 as cited by King Duncan in his sermon, "Seeking Christ" as posted on www.sermon.com ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Dynamic Preaching First Quarter 2012, by King Duncan

8. Rewritten portion of King Duncan's, "Seeking Christ" as posted on www.sermon.com ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Dynamic Preaching First Quarter 2012, by King Duncan