

Title: Who Wants To Be Chosen?

Text: Luke 1:26-31

Some months ago there was a feature article in "The New York Times" about a man in Michigan who had unsuccessfully run for office eight years in a row. That year, however, he had just missed winning. How had he felt when he came so close to winning at last? "Panicky" was his reply, "I hadn't thought of winning; I just like to run."

I couldn't help <sup>but</sup> thinking that this man's attitude is not really as strange as it may seem. All the emphasis seems to be on winning elections, not on what happens afterward. Not a few men in public life have failed because they were unprepared to do anything with the office they had worked so hard to win.

This is also true beyond political life. A few years ago, at a ~~conv~~ convention, I talked with a friend who is a minister of Christian Education. He confessed that he didn't really like his work, but he loved job-hunting and the thrill of being selected by a church committee. ~~I belong to the Rotary Club here in Yonkersville~~ One of my members in a former church ran an employment placement agency for professional people and he told me that often people would come to him seeking new positions, not because they really wanted to change jobs, but because they liked being courted by employers.

Advent is like that for many of us. We spend this season looking for Christ to come into our lives, little thinking beyond what will happen once we have found him. We all want to be God's chosen people, but few of us are prepared to go any further than winning the election. Yet it ~~is~~ what happens after the election that is of primary importance.

Let's conder Mary, <sup>The Mother of Jesus</sup> ~~the maid of Galilee~~. The angel Gabriel came to her with the startling election news: "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you." She had been chosen by God to be the mother of Christ Jesus. "Do not be afraid, Mary," he told her, "for you have found favor with God." Could any woman ever be more blessed and honored than this?

*Mary* found favor with God. But Mary couldn't believe this. Surely the angel had made a mistake, gotten his addresses mixed; his message, no doubt, was intended for another Mary. This favor of which the angel spoke would certainly be given to a woman of one of the royal or priestly families, not to a peasant girl. She had little education, culture, or background suitable to prepare her for such a task. She tried to live a godly life, but she knew she did not deserve to be chosen for this task.

And Mary was right: She did not deserve her election as the mother of Christ. It was God's grace, not her goodness, that determined her choice. God's favor, you see, reflects his goodness, not ours. To be chosen by God, is an occasion, not for pride, but for humility. Fortunately, it was in humility that Mary responded. She did not congratulate God for his wise choice as ~~some~~ <sup>some</sup> of us might have done. I had a man tell me once, "Pastor, you are very lucky to have me as a member of this church." This man was congratulating God for his fine chose.

This question of election had always been a concern for the people of Israel. They knew that they were God's chosen people. This meant that they did not choose him, but he chose them, just as Jesus was later to say to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I have chosen you." Furthermore, the people of Israel were constantly warned that they had been chosen, not because of their righteousness, but because of God's grace. The whole O.T. message emphasizes that God's love for Israel was ~~wholly unmerited~~ <sup>unearned</sup>.

For many people being a Christian has meant a sense of personal achievement rather than the mercy of God. People have prided themselves in being God's elect when it has been humility that was called for. Though Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their prim respectability, Christians have often erected a new Phariisaiism on the ruins of the old. They have taken pride in being the "nice people," the "good guys," the righteous.

When John the Baptist came preaching to prepare the way for Jesus, he condemned the so-called "religious people" of his time, and warned them that they would be the very ones hardest hit by God's coming judgment.

When God chose us, it reflected His mercy -- not our goodness. His election of us is always a matter of mercy. As Peter said in I Peter 2:4: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

2. Something else Mary learned about <sup>being chosen</sup> ~~election~~ by God: it is not only a glorious privilege, but also a great responsibility.

A "Miss America" of several years ago said in her last press interview that when she had been chosen "Miss American," all she could see was the honor of having been chosen. But she had found during the reign of one year that being "Miss America" is hard work.

Isn't this what Mary discovered, also? The paradox of God's favor, of receiving his blessedness. There is joy in being chosen, but let us never forget that God chooses us because he has a purpose for us, something he wants us to do or to become. *There is responsibility*

Mary must have sensed this, for even as Gabriel was singing the glory of her election as the mother of the Christ, ~~Mary~~ Mary replied humbly: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." What she means, as the New English Bible makes clear, is this: "Here am I - the Lord's servant." Mary sensed that her election as the mother of Christ meant - not glory - but servanthood.

This was the greatest source of difficulty that God experienced with the people of Israel. They were his chosen people, but they all too frequently looked upon their ~~election~~<sup>choice</sup> in terms of privilege, not of ~~responsibility~~ responsibility. Because they were his special people, they saw their position as one of prestige and superiority. What God had in mind, however, was not prestige, but a task. They were called, not to be his "fair-haired boys," but his servants.

Mary was chosen to be the mother of Christ and there was honor in that choice. But more than honor, there was a purpose to serve, a task to perform, a service to be rendered. And so it was as a faithful servant that she endured the long, grueling journey to Bethlehem, that she suffered the pain of childbirth on the straw of a crude stable, that she consented to the hasty, fearful flight into Egypt. This was the favor that God bestowed upon her.

And it is the same with us, who call ourselves Christians. As Peter puts it: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." Why?....that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." God chose us because he has something for us to do - a purpose to fulfill; a mission to perform. We can glory in the privileges and blessing of God's grace only if we are willing to carry out that privilege in responsibility. God has called us to be servants "to declare the wonderful (love) of God who called us out of darkness into his light."

One day Jesus took his disciples out of Galilee to a more remote area and questioned them as to whom others and themselves thought him to be. At last, Peter confessed that he believed Jesus to be the Christ, the son of God, and Jesus Confirmed Peter's statement.

Can you imagine what a joyous moment that must have been for the disciples? How wonderful for them to have been chosen to be disciples of the One sent from God. What an honor.

But Jesus went on to say something else that seemed incredible. What a shock. What a disappointment. No sooner had they congratulated themselves on being disciples of Jesus than he turned and said to them: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Election, Jesus is saying meant, not honor, but service.

When Charles R. Brown of Yale was addressing students on a western campus, he said: "I come from a larger university than this: it is larger than Columbia, or Yale, or all the American universities combined. It is the University of Life. Our colors are black and blue, for we learn our lessons by hard knocks. In this university there is only one examination day, and in that examination there is but one question. It is that question that I have come to ask you. What is ~~Christianity?~~ <sup>The Christian life</sup>" Then he continued: "Let us ask the Great Teacher Jesus, and hear his answer by word and deed; ~~Christianity~~ <sup>The Christian life</sup> is service: "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

It is not enough to win the elect'ion. As it was for the man running for public office, we must also look to what lies ~~at~~ beyond.

What does it mean that God ~~chose us~~ chose us? Simply this: the favor of God reflects his goodness, not ours; it is a matter of both privilege and responsibility, <sup>which</sup> and it leads to service.

".....you are a chosen race," says Peter, "royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

What use is there for us in this Advent season to seek the living Christ and be found by him unless we are willing to be used of God to declare his wonderful deeds?

Dr. C. Roy Angell tells this story. It was Christmas time. A certain man drove up to the curb in a shiny, new ~~car~~ Cadillac. A ragged boy came up and said, "Boy, mister, is that your car?" The man replied that it was. Then the boy said, "She sure is pretty, I bet it cost a lot." "I guess it did," said the man, "but my older brother gave it to me." "Say, minister," said the boy, "I wish," and the man thought he would say, "I wish I had a brother like that." But the boy said, "Boy, I wish I could be a brother like that." The man was greatly touched, so he said, "Come on and I'll give you a ride." "Oh no," said the boy, "my dirty clothes might mess up your car." The man insisted so the boy got in the car and they rode off down the street. The boy then asked the man to stop at a certain old two-story house. Then the boy ran upstairs and soon came back, carrying a little crippled boy in his arms.

He pointed to the new car and said, "There it is, little brother. Isn't it a beaut? His big brother gave it to him. But don't you worry. Someday I'll buy you one and we'll go down town and I'll show you all the pretty things in the store windows. Yes, your big brother will buy you one someday." The man wiped away his tears and said, "Come on, we'll go right

now." He took the boys downtown and bought them enough things to make their Christmas a happy one.

God has called us that big brother to people around us. He has called us to ~~serve~~ not to be served, but to serve. One day Jesus will come again. And when he does, may he find us living for Him.

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Loving for Jesus a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do,  
Yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

O Jesus, Lord and Saviour, I give myself to Thee;  
For Thou, in Thy atonement did give thyself to me,

I own no other master,  
My heart shall be thy Throne,  
My life I give, henceforth to live, ~~obey~~

O Christ, for thee alone.