

Easter 6 John 15:9-17

Jesus said, "You did not choose me, I chose you". These are the powerful, and in some ways, surprising words from today's gospel. They are surprising because on the face of it they do not make sense. Jesus doesn't say, "I chose you and you chose me" which is how we think of our relationship with the Lord, that we were called by grace and chose to accept that grace in response through our own free will. Jesus said, "you did not choose me, I chose you". It seems we played no part in the decision at all, that we in fact have no choice.

But we can remember a time when we made a commitment to Christ, right? We can remember being confirmed and making our public commitment, or we can remember a time when we were not Christian at all and we heard the call and responded to it, or we can remember a time when we strayed from a faith perhaps we were born into and came back, but we decided that, we took stock of our life wherever we were at the time and we chose faith over denial. We made a choice that others have not made, surely we must be part of the transaction, it is not all about God, and we don't feel constrained by the choice we have made, if anything we speak of freedom that comes from our faith.

Well with passages out of St John's gospel we sometimes have to look at things a little differently, written as it was some time after the other 3 gospels and with a very different intent and audience in mind, St. John's gospel focuses on the spiritual rather than the biographical aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus certainly did choose us, we believe that, by God's grace we have been invited into relationship with the almighty and through that relationship feel whole as the spiritual part of ourselves is acknowledged and fed as well as our physical selves. When we hear and recognise God calling to us, when we truly understand the importance of that, the gravity of the situation, God, the all-encompassing, omnipotent, omniscient, love itself, calls to us, insignificant, 1 out of several billion, so far removed from God as to question why me, how could we ignore such a call, where really is the choice in that.

In human terms it is like a very important person, perhaps royalty or something, sending us an invitation to a dinner. We would not respond if we didn't receive the invitation, we may choose not to respond if we don't think it was meant for us or that it is real, we might refuse if we don't appreciate the value or importance of the one who sent it, but if we understood the enormous privilege bound up in the invitation we would surely accept it.

You did not choose me, I chose you. That means we can put aside the worries we have of not being worthy, or not being good enough as a Christian to keep our place in relationship with God, it was never about us and our abilities, but always about God and his invitation by grace. And this has far reaching consequences about living in Christian communities, such as our church family, as the statement is as true for each of us individually as it is for the person sitting next to us or in front of us or behind us, it is true for everyone sitting in a Christian church anywhere, it is true for the person moved and disturbed by a sense of God's presence but who has not found a Christian community to belong to. They did not choose this either, they have been chosen.

So however special we feel when we consider God's great gift to us through Jesus, they are just as special because they are recipients of the same gift. Each time we struggle with church relationships or inter church relationships, or indeed any relationships, we must remember that God loves those who sit on both sides of every argument. Perhaps a good analogy is to describe God as a parent, mother or father, watching siblings quarrel, as the parent God is beyond caring about who started it, or who is most liable for the fight, or even who is wrong and who is right, God just wants all the children to find a way to get along, because no parent can bear to witness hatred between the children they love in equal measure and without question.

As God's children we have a responsibility to work for peace, justice and the display of love in the world. Not because it's better for us, but because it is better for God. Just like in our earthy families we sometimes keep the peace so as to keep granny or mum happy, and often by doing that we come to a closer relationship with those we struggle with, so it is in our wider family. If we are motivated not by our own needs, wants and grievances, but rather motivated by God we will find ways to bear fruit as Jesus commands.

Jesus reveals to us in today's reading that he is our friend, not someone in charge who barks orders at us with the expectation of compliance and doesn't tell us why we have to do the things he demands. Jesus is our friend, he shares with us his story, he reveals to us God's nature of love and inspires us through example rather than orders to serve one another in that love. Because God perfects us in our relationship with him that service is not a chore but joy and privilege. Christians who live out their faith in worship are not doing it to get into God's good books, working hard for a perceived reward in heaven, we are free to serve and do it with joy because of the perfect love of God we have already experienced. God's love for us is unchanging, he has chosen us seemingly without our input, we certainly have done nothing that could deserve his attention, yet by that love we are perfected as members of Christ's body, equally valuable and precious in his sight and with a vital role to play in the coming of his kingdom.

May you hear, understand and truly accept God's call to you today, remembering that you have not chosen this life but rather you are the one who has been chosen.