

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“God’s Choices”

June 12, 2011 - Pentecost

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Acts 2: 1-8, 12-18

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ¹³But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ “In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.*

Mark Twain once told about a man who had died and met St. Peter at the pearly gates. Realizing that St. Peter was a wise and knowledgeable man, the deceased asked, “St. Peter, I have been interested in military history for many years. Tell me, who was the greatest general of all time?” St. Peter replied quickly, “Oh, that is a simple question. It’s that man right over there,” as he pointed nearby. The deceased was surprised. “But you must be mistaken,” he said. “I knew that man on earth and he was just a common laborer.” “That’s right, my friend,” replied St. Peter. “But if he would only have been a general, he would have been the greatest general of all time.”

The moral of the story Twain explained, is not to shortchange your potential. All people are created with the equal ability to become unequal. Those who stand out from the crowd have learned to develop and to use what they have been given. He suggested that we think how much greater our lives might be if we live and work as if we had no idea how little or how much we might accomplish.

Sometimes when we look at the Bible and its stories, it is easy to get carried away with its sacred nature. It all seems so impressive, so holy, and so beyond the things we experience. We don’t find such faith and miracles around these days and these times. Those people in the Bible spoke so well. They all seemed so strong and capable. They were gifted in faith and in other ways we can’t begin to match. But were they?

Abraham was the most ordinary person one could hope to meet. He had been relatively successful in his business life. He had many possessions and lived relatively secure. But he wasn’t anything special. His family life and his marriage were in a real mess. His wife Sarah was old and she had been unable to deliver what Abraham wanted most- a son. In desperation, Abraham had sought the comfort and attention of his wife’s maid, Hagar. And Abraham himself was no spring chicken! He was not the picture of youth and enthusiasm that we would associate with success.

Yet on one night, with the stars shining brightly in the sky, Abraham set forth on an adventure of faith. God called him to do a great thing, to begin a great nation. Unsure of how it all might turn out, God sent Abraham forth with just a promise, a reminder of what his life could be like if he lived and acted in faith.

We don't know as much about the disciple Matthew. But what we do know isn't so good. He was a tax collector for the Romans who ruled Judea. Tax collectors were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were scoundrels. They robbed widows and orphans. They were people of small character and selfish ambition.

Yet one day Jesus called Matthew to embark upon a great adventure in faith. Matthew wasn't given any special ability and it seemed he had little to contribute to the cause. He followed Jesus on the basis of nothing more than a promise that he would find something worthwhile.

I wonder why God would choose someone like Abraham to be the father of a great nation through which all other nations would be blessed. I wonder why Jesus would choose Matthew when it seemed there were better choices for disciples. The Bible doesn't explain the choices. All we can be certain of is this: those who God chooses are usually utterly ordinary folk, folk with their share of problems, folk with a past that doesn't promote a bright future.

Maybe God likes a challenge! Maybe God chooses the ordinary so that when something extraordinary happens we will be more impressed. Maybe it is because that in the adventure of faith, otherwise ordinary people learn that God can do some mighty great things through them. God delights in leading us into the unknown, helping us to discover the potential and the promise with which we were first created.

Maybe we don't think of our little, ordinary lives as the theatre in which God can do wonderful things. In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of the court life and the pressures of being king. He made application to the local monastery, asking to be accepted as a monk for the rest of his life. In this way, he could truly do God's will. The head of the monastery questioned his decision. "Your majesty, do you understand that the pledge we make here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king." "I understand," said Henry. "I will obey you, as Christ leads you." "Very well," said the monk. "I order you to go back to your throne and serve faithfully." For King Henry, God's choice was for him to be faithful through obedience in the life he was already living.

God has chosen us. God has chosen you. Through God's call to be followers, God makes this world a better place. The stories of Abraham and Matthew tell me that we can't always figure out God's choices. God calls who God wants to call. God gives to each of us jobs that we might not choose to do. But you must know that whether you feel uncertain or most capable, what you do in God's name is big stuff. God blessed the world through you. God blessed the world through each of us here. Thanks be to God!