

NARRATIVE LECTIONARY – ACTS 17:1-9; I THESSALONIANS 1:1-10
 WED/SAT/SUN, APR 20/23/24, 2016 FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
 (GOSPEL???) PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



What does it feel like to be picked, selected, chosen, elected?

Truly, our **first** response to that question should be: *Well, it kind of depends on what we're being picked, selected, chosen or elected...to do, right?*

Who here has been in the military? What happens when someone asks for volunteers? One who outranks you might say, ***You have been volunteered...***

In school, the teacher might say, ***I choose you to go to the black/white/Smart(!) board and solve this equation...***"

Here at church you might be **invited** to stand up here on the top steps and **recite** the 10 Commandments, or the Lord's Prayer...

In the business world, your **boss** might say to you something like, *You've done such good work...that we're going to give you even more to do...*

Those are things we might be happy to **never** be chosen for, right?

But let's say that we've *been volunteered* for something good, something exciting, something fun.



Then what does it feel like to be picked, selected, chosen, or elected?

-happy, affirmed, honored

With that in mind, there's something **amazing** that happens in this story from the early church. Paul and Silas **enter** a foreign city called *Thessalonica*, **head** to the synagogue, start **preaching**... and ***the people get it!*** We're told that *some of the Jews, a great many of the devout **Greeks**, and **not a few of the leading women** became followers of Jesus from that moment on!*

Now, on the **one** hand, we kind of **expect** that to happen, right? I mean, this is the **Bible** and it's **God's Spirit** at work through the apostles. Yet on the **other** hand, those who ***get it*** have not simply been wandering, wondering, waiting for something **different** to come along and help them change their lives. No, these devout foreign ***men-and-women*** have been studying Juda-ism as the way of God's truth.

And, according to the Apostle Paul, if ever there was an -ism that could help us get to the truth about **God**, then **Judaism** would be it (Galatians 3:21b).

So here's a question to ponder: *What, do you suppose, could persuade these students of Judaism to change course, to jump ship, to stop studying that religion and, instead, become followers of Jesus Christ?*

The **answer**, I think, can be found in what the apostle Paul says in 1st Thessalonians 1:4. He writes, *For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that (Christ) has chosen you...* Did you hear that? *Christ has chosen you!*

Let's think about that for a minute. This means that If Christ chose all of **them**...then that also means that Jesus Christ has chosen you, and you, and me, and...ALL OF US!!!

Now, again, the people that Paul is talking to have been working hard to make themselves right for God. They've been studying the bible, they've been trying to live a law-led life, they've been careful about what they eat – in short, they've been living by God's Word in hopes that they can earn the right to be called one of God's Chosen, one of God's Elect.

That's ok, it's not a bad way to live, but, as I see it, there's a real **problem** with that approach to **God**. Let's *imagine* that two people fall in love... Pretty soon **one** says to the **other**, *I love you-let's get married!*



What would it be like of the *other* person were to say, *That's a GREAT idea - I'd be HAPPY to marry you...as SOON as you:*

-earn enough money -lose some weight -put on some weight
 -dye your hair -grow some hair (!) -etc...

That's not really **love**, is it? **True love** would say, ***I love you as you are!*** These people that Paul was talking to were convinced that they couldn't be called children of God until they proved themselves worthy of it.

So...



...imagine what it must have felt like to suddenly hear that you don't have to prove yourself, you don't **have** to demonstrate your devotion, you don't **have** to be perfect before God will love you!

I use a **Pre-marriage Awareness Inventory** for couples who are planning to get married. It's a survey of ~ 150 statements that the future spouses are asked to respond to as individuals. Then the answers are compiled and we get to have fun talking about them together. One statement declares: *We are a perfect match...* and the only two options offered are: *Yes* or *No*.



Realists will often answer that statement with a **NO** – since no person is perfect, no relationship can be perfect.

And idealists often answer that statement with a YES – because they truly believe it to be true.

In **my** presence, NO ONE has **ever** said to their future spouse, *I'm perfect but... I guess I'll have to settle for you!*

The answer **usually** agreed on is that yes, both future spouses are imperfect people, but in the eyes of **love** they are perfect for **each other**.

So here's the other part of the secret that those foreigners found in Paul's preaching: they came to believe that each and every person on the face of the earth is perfect simply because Christ's love makes us perfect in the eyes of God.

Says Jesus in John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.*

That is **pure grace**: those people are loved by God – not for who they could or should be, but simply for who they **are**. And the **same** is true for *me and you*, right? God loves us – not for who we could or should be, but simply for who we are.



We're told that the Jewish leaders are jealous of this shocking desertion of their potential members. And they accuse the apostles of *turning the world upside down* (17:6). Think about that for a minute.

How do you suppose they were turning the world upside down?

What might they have been saying to invite that kind of criticism?? Were the preachers trying to:

-incite revolution? -overthrow the government?

-refuse to pay taxes? -lie/cheat/steal?
 -commit adultery? -commit murder?

No – here’s what they were saying that got them in trouble:

-that there is One Author of life, and that God is good
 -that all people are equal in God’s loving eye
 -that Jesus died for the sins of all people
 -and that daily we are all being sent into the world to *show and tell* everyone we meet “the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”

Here’s the deal: *you and I have been given the greatest power in the world, the power to turn this world upside down, to change this world with God’s gift of love.* And it’s not about being picked, chosen, or elected to do something big and wonderful in life – it’s about making sure that we share God’s love with **everyone** in our lives.

There are no great acts, only small acts
 done with great love

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa said it this way: *"There are no **great** acts, only **small** acts done with **great** love."*

So celebrate this good news, that you, you, you and all of us have been chosen to turn this world upside down simply by sharing God’s gift of forgiveness and love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.