

CHOSEN

Psalms 96: 1-13
I Thessalonians 1:1-10

Faith Community
October 20, 2002

Introduction

A teacher met with one of her students who was doing poorly in math. She met with him over and over to try to help him learn. But part of the problem was that the boy's heart wasn't in it. Repeatedly he missed homework assignments. He didn't seem to be trying very hard.

"I'm just not good at math," the boy said.

"I think you could be very good at math," the teacher answered. "You have the ability, you just need to apply yourself." Finally she said, "You know, I think I believe in you more than you believe in you."

As people called by God, sometimes God believes in us more than we believe in ourselves.

I

God has chosen you. God has called you and me to work with him to strengthen God's kingdom. God believes in us and calls on us to help in God's mission in the world.

Think of it; the creator of the universe, the one who made everything from the tiniest atom to the most distant star wants your help. The Lord of Life has chosen you as a co-worker.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit..." It's not so much that we select God as God selects us. We have been chosen by God.

II

It makes a difference when someone chooses you; when someone believes in you. Most of us are influenced by other people in knowing who we are. Actually from the time we are born we discover who we are by seeing how people respond to us. As a child you run fast and everyone cheers you on and tells you what a good runner you are.

As a teen you smile at someone of the opposite sex and they smile back, letting you know they are interested in you.

You take one of your first science tests and get an "A" and discover something about yourself.

When a friend of mine was in junior high he took an English class where he always got "C's." No matter how hard he tried - or how long he studied - he always got a "C." Part way through the year the teacher had to be out for an extended leave. The school brought in a long-term substitute. My friend enjoyed the way the substitute taught. She took an interest in him. Now when he took tests he got back papers with "A's" on them. He realized that he was good at English.

Then the permanent teacher returned. When report cards came out my friend was excited about opening his report card and seeing his English grade. As he opened the card he read, ENGLISH ---C.

He was devastated. He went back to his classroom and straight to his teacher. He held out the report card,

“This says I got a “C” but I had “A’s” on almost all of my tests.”

The teacher looked at his card, then dropped it on the desk. “I don’t know what you did, but you are nothing but a “C” student.”

The student was crushed, of course, but he also knew that the teacher was wrong. Someone had shown him how much he could do. He would never forget that.

Several years ago some scientist did a study of the effects grades had on students. A teacher gave a test and arbitrarily gave half of the students high grades on it, and the other half low grades. The grades had nothing to do with how the students actually did on the test.

A few months later the teacher gave a test again and this time graded it honestly. Most of the students who had arbitrarily been given high grades on the first test, earned high grades on the second test; even if they hadn’t done well before that. One student commented afterwards, “I never knew I was so smart in history, until I took this course.”

When someone shows us what we are capable of, it can be a life-changing experience. That someone believes in us can make a tremendous difference.

III

Imagine what you can do, knowing that God believes in you. If a teacher thinks we are capable and it changes our lives; if a parent knows we can succeed and it inspires us, imagine what we can do if we know that the Lord God believes in us. We are important enough that God entrusts his work into our hands.

A man worked for his company for many years. He was a diligent worker who arrived on time, was careful about his work, and put in that extra effort when it was necessary. He wasn’t showy and didn’t draw attention to himself; he just worked hard. One day the president of the company called him into his office. Everybody dreaded being called into the president’s office because it usually meant you did something really wrong. The worker couldn’t figure out what he could have done wrong.

“We are beginning a new project,” the president said, “and I want you to be in charge of it for us,”

“Me? I mean I’m really flattered,” the worker answered, “but why me?”

“I have been watching you for some time and you are the person we need. You commit yourself to a job and make sure it is done right. That’s especially important with this job. I’d like you to begin the first of next month.”

“Yes, sir, I am honored that you asked me,” the worker said.

But then he had second thoughts. Am I really able to handle a project this big? Will I be able to do enough to make it happen?

Then a little later he thought to himself, “If the boss believes that I can do this job, then probably I can. He’s the boss. He’s the one who has lots of experience with these kinds of decisions. He’s a smart man and makes good decisions, why should I think he wouldn’t make a good decision about me.”

The boss's confidence convinced the worker he was capable of the job. And the boss was right, he did a very effective job.

God has chosen us. Like that worker we can trust the one who knows a lot more about these things than we do, to choose the right person. Trust God's decision about you.

IV

Look around you. All day long you are surrounded by people who are looking to you. Family, co-workers, friends, strangers. You and I can make a difference in those lives. Something we say, the way we act, and how we respond to difficult times will be seen by these people. In small or great ways we influence people by what we do. Is our influence toward the better, the higher, the more godly?

I think even driving out the driveway to go to church every Sunday is a kind of witness to the neighborhood. "They go to church every Sunday." Maybe at some point one of the neighborhood kids will ask, "Why don't we go to church every Sunday?"

At work people are looking at you to see how you respond. Do you take the high road? Are you forgiving? Are you able to provide "tough love" when that's necessary? Do you keep a tight grip on resentments, or can you let go? Do you use other people for your own self-gain?

God chooses some people like Moses or Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King, Jr. for world-changing greatness. For others of us God draws the circle a little closer. We don't influence people all over the world, but we influence the people in our world. You and I have the opportunity to make a real difference in the world where we live. We touch lives every day.

Conclusion

God has chosen you. The apostle Paul writes that, "We are ambassadors for Christ," and we are. We are God's representatives in the world. That's no small responsibility. We may not be ambassadors to the entire world, but we are to our little corner of the world.

In my ministry here I often look to you. When I am discouraged, or feel like someone is acting unreasonably, just don't feel like things are progressing as quickly as I would like them to, I will often remind myself of one of you.

The dedicated person who steps forward to help without any fanfare or even recognition. The positive person you know you can count on. The people whose spirits lift the spirits of those around them.

You are ambassadors, not only to your world of work, or your neighborhood, or your family, but also to the other members of your church family.

We are all ambassadors, chosen by God. We are called to join in Christian ministry in everything we do.

Amen