

*9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

"You did not choose me but I chose you."

Eleven disciples stood before Jesus as he spoke those words: You did not choose me but I chose you.

Jesus did not put up a building and advertise in the local paper. He walked along the lakeshore and picked his disciples one by one.

He walked by a tax booth and called Levi.

He found Phillip and said, "Follow me!"

When Phillip brought Nathaniel to him Jesus addressed Nathaniel as one Jesus already knew which certainly surprised Nathaniel. "You did not choose me but I chose you."

Just as God had chosen Israel.

The chosen people they were called, out of all peoples God elected them. Like a lamb lost and straying in the wilderness that God took them into his arms and blessed and carried his people.

Chosen just as God chose Moses whom the Lord saved from death through Miriam floating the basket that was his boat to be seen by Pharaoh's daughter - saving him from the death that was commanded for all the baby boys. The Lord chose Moses to speak even though Moses said he was not a good speaker. The Lord chose him to lead his people to freedom, to the Promised Land.

Chosen, like David, just a young boy; when Samuel came looking for king material among Jesse's sons, they did not even fetch David at first. But he was the one chosen by God.

Chosen, that is the word that Luke tells us the voice from heaven spoke on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, and a cloud descended and the voice spoke, "This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him."

And now he speaks to the disciples, “You did not chose me, but I chose you.”

What do you think? Are you chosen too? Out of all the people in this city, all the people in this state, all the people in this country, this world, has the Almighty God chosen you? Has God chosen you to be you, to be disciple of Jesus in the life and the place where you are?

Or was it only St. Paul who was chosen? With him it was so clear Jesus was choosing, The blinding presence of the Lord, his voice asking, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” But what about me?

Was God choosing me on February 22, 1947? When my mother held me in a little church out in the country near Sandusky, Ohio when Pastor Lucht poured the water over my head and said, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and Of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” was the Almighty God electing me, choosing me? I believe that God was doing just that.

And what about you? Was God choosing you when you were baptized, even if you were an adult? Surely the disciples thought, we chose Jesus, he called, we followed. But Jesus said, “You did not choose me, I chose you.”

In your baptism God chose you. In the water and the word Jesus claimed you and your life for himself. “You are not your own, you were bought with a price,” St. Paul reminds us. And that price was the suffering and dying of your Lord, Jesus Christ.

“You did not choose me, I chose you.” Now what? “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Love one another.

Friday a member of the congregation I serve returned from a trip to South Africa. There she had been with the members of the Lutheran church in the Northeran Diocese of the Lutheran Church. She traveled in areas so isolated that a few young children wanted to touch her face; they had never been so near a white person before. Everywhere she went there were embraces, warm greeting - expressions of love.

So it is today here and with Pastor Mims in Avon Lake. You receive me warmly, the people there receive him. “Love one another,” Jesus said, and we do it.

But when Pastor Mims comes back home here, and I return to my church there I will find a few who are not speaking to one another. It is harder to love one another when we know one another well.

Especially in our families when we have been hurt by the very people God appointed to love us and nurture us, and honor us.

I remember hearing a story from a Lutheran Pastor in Grand Forks North Dakota who one Sunday at the end of the confession of sins told the members of the congregation to turn and face one another and say, "In Jesus' name I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins."

After the worship a woman spoke to that pastor angrily, "How could you ask me to declare him forgiven, after what he has done to me." She was sitting next to her husband.

"Love one another as I have loved you." Doesn't Jesus understand how difficult and complicated it is for us to do that? Listen to his next words: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Love is never easy. Love is costly. Through the centuries God suffered with God's people Israel. The Lord led them on the way, showed them the way but they were soon worshipping a golden calf, or complaining about the food, or prowling around looking for a god more to their liking. And is it any different with me?

The Lord says, "Trust in me!" and I worry.

The Lord says, "Forgive!" and I hold a grudge.

The Lord says, "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked!" and I want something new for me instead, clothing, a car.

What can God do with such people? Die for them - take all the punishment I deserve, and you deserve, and lay that punishment upon his own Son. That is all that God can do with us.

Thank God for Jesus who has the greatest love, laying down his life for his friends - for you - for me.

Jesus says, "Love one another like that. As I have loved you."

You are chosen for loving one another. Here in this place, these very people that you are getting to know so well. If you are like most congregations one moment you will be so close and the next someone will be angry with someone and there may be division. Through it all Jesus says, "Love one another."

And he makes this promise: "The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." That is quite a promise Jesus is making to you. "The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name."

Even if you should ask for love for another member of this church, one that has hurt you, slighted you, acted better than you, even if you should ask God for love for that person,

Jesus promises the Father will deliver. Jesus commands you to love; Jesus will make that love possible for you.

And as he does this promise will come true: “I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

As you love one another as Jesus has loved you, Jesus' joy will be in you, and your joy will be complete.

God grant it. Amen.