

Called to See the Invisible 2024
Deuteronomy 7:6-9 Mark 9:30-37

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

Mark 9:30-37 (New Revised Standard Version)

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Back when I used to run a small business,

I always tried to hire the most capable employees I could afford
assuming that the better and more skillful my employees were,
the better and more profitably the business would run.

Generally that’s how we evaluate and select in this world.

One time my sales manager handed me a job application
and joked, “She actually thought we might hire her.”

The “she” was a single mother who hadn’t finished high school,
was living with her parents and working part-time at a salon,
and no, those weren’t the qualifications we generally looked for.

A couple of days later she called the store to find out
if a decision had been made yet, and the manager answered
“No, we’re still meeting with applicants and doing interviews.”

She called almost every day for the next 2 weeks,
and each time they had a similar conversation.

Eventually she wanted to speak with me, and explained that
she really wanted the job, and just needed an opportunity,
so I invited her to come in for me to meet her.

Her persistence and tenacity, her presence impressed me enough
that I over-ruled our sales manager and hired her on the spot.

Now based on her education, work history, situation & experience,
she never would have been even considered, yet she blossomed
and grew into her job way beyond my wildest expectations.
And looking back over all my years in business, **she was my best hire.**

**From the outside, we can't really know with certainty
their true value & worth, their commitment & loyalty,
someone is truly capable of accomplishing.**

or what

**Sometimes the world's perception of what is of value and matters,
our sense of a person's worth can be a little distorted & skewed.
So maybe it's a sign of God's grace, creativity, wonder and wisdom,
that people can be such surprisingly unpredictable creatures.**

I used to enjoy watching a TV show on PBS ,
in which people brought in odd treasures and family heirlooms,
for an antique expert to evaluate and appraise what it's worth.

It was amazing how valuable & precious some common object could be,
primarily because it was made by a particular artisan
or had once been owned by a celebrity or someone famous.

Applying that to human beings, then how valuable each of us must be,
for each having been **uniquely & purposefully made by our Creator.**

Yes, each of us, were made by THE renowned master craftsman, God,
yet we humans are not always very good or accurate at recognizing
or appraising a person's value, hidden worth and capabilities-
-for God's love sees value & worth that's beyond our understanding.

One of the great lessons that's repeated throughout Scripture
is that God seems to delight in reversing human expectations,
& calling the most unlikely folks, unqualified it would seem,
to accomplish the most astounding and extraordinary tasks.

For example,
if you intended to build a Church that would change the world,
if you were Jesus, **for that seemingly impossible task,**
--- would you have chosen any of his 12 disciples?

Or when God needed someone to stand before Pharaoh,
and to demand & force him to let the Hebrew people go,
and then to teach and lead those slaves and their descendants
through forty years in the wilderness to the Promised Land-

--- would you have really chosen Moses?
- an 80 year old fugitive murderer with a speech impediment,
a bad temper and almost unwilling to serve and to lead?

God's choices seem to have very little to do with proven talents,
and clearly, not the skills or track record that we would look for.

Obviously God chooses for his own reasons.

It is along those same lines, for God's own reasons
that Israel was chosen, set apart by God, for God's own purpose...

... as Moses explained to them in the Deuteronomy text,
just before they crossed into the Promised Land. vs. 6

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen you** out of all the
peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

When I used to teach Old Testament at a community college in NC,
one of the questions that always came up every semester,
was that, some student would ask, "**So why Israel?**"

Why did God chose them, instead of the Babylonians or Romans?
Why not the Egyptians, the Moabites or even the Philistines?
What was it about Israel that made them God's chosen people?

So when asked that, I'd point to this Deuteronomy passage, vs. 7-8

**It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on
you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you ...**

It was because the Lord loved you ...

For no clear, obvious or understandable reason,
God simply chose to love and to show grace to Israel,
and ultimately, **to bless & heal the world through Israel.**

God chose Israel though they were the weakest and least likely,
so to reveal God's power, because whatever success they did have,
could only have been accomplished through God,
for obviously these powerless slaves and outcasts,
couldn't have achieved much of anything on their own.

The Apostle Paul wrote explaining to the Christians in Corinth
why God chooses to accomplish the astounding and remarkable
through the unlikely and seemingly unqualified folks, 1 Cor 1:25~29,

For **God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom**, and God's weakness is stronger than
human strength ... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in
the world to shame the strong; ... **so that no one might boast in the presence of God.**

God is sovereign and will surely accomplish his plan and purpose,
not because of the high quality or skills of the men and women
chosen and called by God to accomplish the task and mission,
and not because of their great gifts and abilities, or achievement,
**but because God chooses to accomplish extraordinary things,
through the most surprisingly plain and ordinary people.**

God's plan and perfection is worked through human imperfection.

As a practical truth, that means when you or I are invited,
encouraged or nominated to volunteer for something,

the question is really not
if we are able, competent or skilled enough to serve,
but if we are willing to listen, learn and follow,
willing to let God work and accomplish through us...

...for most certainly God will accomplish his intended purpose,
and we are simply being invited to share in God's work and joy.

That understanding is an important message of the Mark 9 passage.

Jesus was on his way traveling toward Jerusalem **and the cross**,
near the end of his public ministry of healing and preaching.

Along this journey Jesus is focused on preparing his disciples
for after his ascension, they will be leading the Church
to be something different than the culture of this world...

... by valuing all humanity with a more gracious perspective,
by being a community that welcomes all of God's children.

Jesus is calling the Church to see people in a whole different way,
a beloved community of faith wonderfully redefined by God's grace.

All through his life and ministry,

Jesus was always attentive to those rejected or ignored,
and toward those who seemed insignificant and without status.

Jesus noticed with compassion those that culture choose not to see...

... and we are called to do the same.

When Jesus and the disciples arrive at their destination, vs. 33-34,

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he (Jesus) asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

Whenever I read this passage, I feel a bit nervous and uncomfortable,

imagining the scene if Jesus were to suddenly appear before me,
as I am complaining or gossiping about something or someone,
berating or blaming someone, or upset - resenting someone,

then the Lord looking at me to explain,

"So Norm, what were you arguing about along the way?"

The heart of the problem was, that the disciples were arguing about,
who would be first, and it was all about pride, ego and vanity...

... and the false notion that I am a little more holy & better than you,
or somehow I am more special, loved and important to God than you.

But I don't read this text as Jesus being angry with them.

Rather, Jesus was trying to teach them to stop and rethink
what they believed about leadership, power & authority.

Jesus sits down to talk & gathers the disciples around him, vs. 35-36,

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all
and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, ...

The language is specific -Jesus wraps his arms around the child,

Jesus embraces that little one before them -----

- and this child becomes an object lesson, an example.

In that culture, parents loved their children just as we do,

but children were also seen as, less-important non-contributors,

as socially insignificant, with little power and mostly ignored,

and hardly worthy of the Master's notice or attention.

But the lesson was not about being humble or having child-like faith,

and the point was not to about trying to be more like children.

Rather, it was to follow the example of Jesus,

in noticing, in welcoming that child, an insignificant nobody.

Jesus was the sort of man, who attracted and welcomed children.

He noticed the people who culturally, others ignored & rejected.

Jesus saw as valuable the ones the world did not see as worthy,

and we are called to do the same.

**Jesus is teaching, that when you welcome the nobody and the outcast,
you are actually welcoming me.**

And when you welcome me, you are welcoming God.

To most, children were of no consequence -- essentially invisible,

and his point is, **to start noticing and seeing the invisible**

because by seeing and welcoming the invisible nobodies,

you are really welcoming Jesus ----

and to welcome Jesus, is to welcome the One who sent him.

Like the disciples, our eyes have been influenced by this world,

to notice the famous and powerful, successful and impressive,

to focus and welcome those who can help us achieve our goals.

But in this text, Jesus is calling us

to see past ourselves, beyond our own interests and desires,

to see past our own egos and **our thirst to be first,**

and be more aware of the invisible and devalued ones...

... by not overlooking and seeing God present and working

in the ordinary, the plain and seemingly insignificant.

God is already doing far more than we can imagine, and the truth is,

God continuously & regularly accomplishes extraordinary things

through the most unexpected, ordinary and faithful people.

The lesson is not about trying harder or busier to accomplish more,
but to connect more and be more extravagant **in sharing God's love**,
by helping the troubled & outcast find God's comfort, love & hope,
by reflecting God's grace, hope and joy especially
to those who probably can't do anything for you.

Though we'd choose the more qualified – obviously God does not.
We set limits and boundaries for inclusion – but Jesus does not.

Our call is to notice and don't overlook
those places, people and situations where God is at work,
or we will miss the wonder & joy, the best & good stuff of life.

God chooses and loves all, despite the chaos we make of our lives,
freely giving by grace what we cannot hope to achieve for ourselves.
God calls us to receive his grace, blessings and compassion,
which has nothing to do with our being qualified or worthy,
for that's just the way it works by grace in the Kingdom of God.

All around us, this world is broken and bitterly divided and angry.
This world cries out in hopelessness, loneliness, fear and need
and though unworthy, the Lord has called us each to respond.

Hear God's Word, Deuteronomy 7:6-8 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 (*The Message*)

You are a people set apart as holy to God, your God. God, **your God, chose you** out of all the people on Earth for himself **as a cherished, personal treasure.**

God wasn't attracted to you and didn't choose you because you were big and important—the fact is, there was almost nothing to you. He did it out of sheer love. God stepped in and mightily bought you back out of that world of slavery, freed you from the iron grip of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

You are the ones **chosen by God**, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, **God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him**, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you— from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.