

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

“A Chosen People”

1 Peter 2:4-10

One of my least fond memories of growing up was PE in elementary school. Now, don't get me wrong – I really liked PE – it's just that I didn't like how my PE teachers went about some things. For instance, we would learn a sport and then we would play it, and that was great, but rather than my PE teachers making up the teams for the sport we were going to play, he would pick two captains – usually the two most popular guys in the class – and then they would choose their teams. More often than not, the captains would choose guys not on the basis of their talent but rather on the basis of whether they too were popular or not. Now, in all honesty, I had some talent in most sports but I wasn't the most popular guy. So no matter what the sport was or how good I was at it, I usually wound up being picked near the end. I hated that. If this has ever happened to you, you know the feeling.

In today's second reading, Peter says that God has picked us to be on his team – to be His people. He didn't choose us because of our talent – that is, he didn't choose us because of what we've done or could ever do – and He didn't choose us because we were popular. He chose us because of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did and because of what He could do for us in Christ. He chose us, Peter says, to be His people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

And He chose us at great cost – not to us but to Him – He chose us at the cost of His own Son's life. As Paul says in Romans 5, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus was rejected so that we might not be – so that we might be chosen by God. He not only took our sins upon himself, he literally became sin for us even though he himself knew no sin – and he died. His cry from the cross of “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me” shows us the depth of that rejection that our sin caused and, in that, he was punished for our sake. But in his resurrection, which we continue to celebrate throughout this season, we see the magnitude of God's love in not only raising Jesus from the dead but also in choosing people like us to share in that resurrection to a new life both now and in the life to come. In Christ, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, God has chosen us to be His very own by grace through faith.

He chose us to be His people. We who were cut off from Him and from each other because of our sin; we who were, as Peter says, not a people, are now the very people of God. And what he did for us individually, he has done for us collectively, so that now we not only belong to Him, we belong to each other. Just as He made the Israelites a people when they were not a people by choosing Abraham, so now He makes us a people by choosing us in Christ.

He chose us to be a royal priesthood. Now a priest is one who ministers to others in the name of God and who goes to God on behalf of others. Having been made right with God through Christ, we are now called to minister to others in Christ's name and, in that, we share what the Bible calls the "ministry of reconciliation." This priesthood, Peter says, is a royal priesthood because we serve the one who is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. We, in and of ourselves, have no royal blood flowing in our veins but now because of Christ, his royal blood has flowed from his veins over us and has cleansed us and it's His royal blood that is at the heart and soul of our priesthood in his name. Thus we proclaim Jesus Christ, the King, and him crucified for one and for all.

He chose us to be a holy nation. Now here "holy" doesn't necessarily mean "sinless" for we know that we were and are still are sinners – forgiven sinners – but sinners nonetheless. No, here "holy" means "set apart" – set apart for a specific purpose – set apart for God's purpose. And just what is that purpose? It's none other than to make disciples of all nations for Christ. You see, God's purpose in saving us, in choosing us, in making us His people and in creating us to be a royal priesthood, is our Great Commission – to go and preach and baptize and bring the full message of salvation in Jesus Christ to every human being on the face of the earth. Indeed, this is not only the job of each of us, it's the job of all of us together.

Ultimately, Peter says, we have been chosen to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. All that we think, all that we say, all that we do, all that we are, is to reflect not us but God. His thoughts are to be our thoughts, his Words our words, His deeds our deeds, and His life our life.

Friends, the Good News for this Fifth Sunday of Easter is that, in the risen Christ, God has chosen us. Christ is our captain and we are his team. How are we responding to being chosen? Are we thankful that He has chosen us? How are we playing now that we've been chosen? Are we giving it our all or are we giving it something less?

God stands ready not only to forgive us for our shortcomings but also to empower us as His chosen people, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, once again today so that we may more and more declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light this coming week. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

May God grant this to us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.