

BUILDING A TEMPLE FOR THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

PENTECOST 11 PROPER 16 – AUGUST 25, 2019

BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN

CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

For at least 10,000 years we've been dividing ourselves into armed camps, absolutely certain that we are right, they are wrong, and we must vanquish them.

As we do this, we tell ourselves a story about OUR kind:

WE are THE chosen ones, THE chosen people, THE chosen race,
THE elect, THE select, THE beloved of God.

We can't all be right. God has selected ONE group to be the best, and that group should win, should call the shots. Right?

Not so fast, says Steven Charleston, a retired bishop of the Episcopal Church, an elder in the Choctaw Nation, and one thoroughly provocative man.¹

We all know, says the bishop, that the Israelite's sacred narrative includes God's assurance that they are a chosen nation. [Exodus 19:6].

The bishop assumes, however, that most of us don't know that the Choctaw Nation's sacred story has a very similar covenant narrative where God assures them that they are God's chosen people.

What if, Bishop Charleston queries, every group is right: they are chosen people.

Of course they are. All are made in God's image, God is present and active not only in all people, but in all places, creatures, planets, and indeed the whole universe: of all that is, seen and unseen.

All people are chosen people, and God has chosen each person for some purpose.

Not all of groups of chosen people have the exact same purpose, just as not all individuals have the exact same purpose.

But all groups of chosen people were created for one goal, and it is not to bring all the other groups into submission under OUR group's feet.

The one goal is to bring the Reign of God near to our neighbors and also to ourselves.

That's what Jesus did for that bent over woman in the synagogue:

God with skin on, Jesus, the Son of God, does all the doing in this story:

The Son of God calls over someone covered in the shame of illness, shame because in those days, the religious teaching was that illness was punishment from God for some sin that you had committed, or if you were really in God's crosshairs, a sin your parents had committed.

The Son of God calls over this bent-over, suffering woman covered in shame

and he touches her, and in the ideology of that time and place, her shame contaminated him. He was now unclean, impure, same as she was... except, look: she was standing up straight.

Instead of Jesus being contaminated by her shame,

she was restored to the full stature of a daughter of Abraham, one of the Chosen People

The synagogue leader didn't understand what happened –

how could Jesus take away the damnation she must have deserved?

Well, Jesus and the synagogue leader get into a kerfuffle over that, but a larger point is being made:

¹ Steven Charleston, "Apocalypse is Not a Dirty Word," *Sojourners*, August, 2019, pp. 34-37

Christ is our peace. Christ is the peace of the world, the universe,
 God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.

As Creator and as Messiah, God does all the doing:

God calls, God touches, God restores us by grace,
 God removes the damnation, the shame, and, most of all,
 the division between all the different chosen peoples of the world.

Why do we even WANT to keep dividing ourselves up, insisting our group is better than all the others,
 and trying to conquer each and every one of the others?

The most charitable rationale is that we, like the synagogue leader,
 think it's because God told us to do it.

That's why it's so telling that Jesus says: it's *necessary for this woman, a daughter of Abraham,
 bound by Satan for eighteen long years, be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath day.*

The Sabbath Day is the day of completeness,
 when all Creation is not just good, but very good. Perfect.

The Sabbath Day wasn't just one "day" in some ancient primeval time,
 the Sabbath Day is the goal of Creation today, tomorrow, and in that glorious eternity
 when God rules all in all.

Jesus brought that bent-over woman into the fullness of God's Sabbath Day right then and right there.

She was chosen by God to be a sign of the destiny of all Creation
 standing upright in a synagogue before a rejoicing crowd.

Yet, she was a sign of the Reign of God breaking into Israel while it was
 occupied and controlled by the mighty, cruel, and violently efficient Roman Empire.

Frankly, not much has changed in terms of how human empires get things done.

Empires thrive on divisions, barriers of hatred, rules, and hostility
 so that those in power can have things their way.

Yet, God keeps choosing people, all different kinds and groups of people,
 to be the beloved ones who ignore the divisions that empires try to set up,
 because God has already joined all of humanity into the body of Christ by the cross.

The cross of Jesus is God's YES to humanity, God's embrace of the whole world
 as Jesus stretched out his arms on the hard wood of the cross.

God chooses all kinds of people, and I'll go so far as to say God chooses all people.

Not everyone will know it.

Certainly not everyone will opt to live for the purpose for which God chose them.

As the lives of Jeremiah and Jesus attest,
 being chosen to fulfill the purposes of God does not assure us an easy life.

The Sabbath Day of God, the Sabbath rest of rejoicing, peace and freedom,
 is not about resting from physical activity so much as it is resting from fear, violence, and oppression.

It turns out that in order to achieve Creation's end purpose
 we will have to work pretty hard at the healing of the creation,

to live into the end of the divisions among the nations
 that God has already promised but that humanity keeps trying build up again.

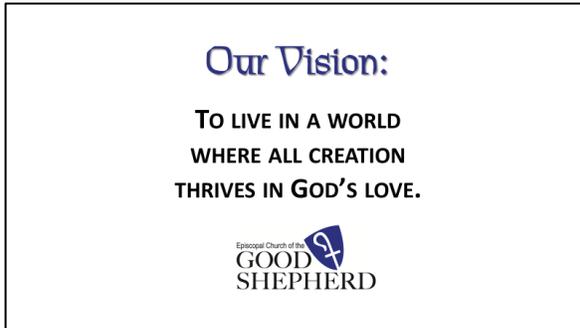
However, this hard work is the path to the peace of Christ that we choose to walk
 when we are buried with Christ and raised to new life in baptism.

God is the one who is making the peace complete for all Creation;
 we have been chosen to join in by building our lives

on the cornerstone of that peace, Christ, the Messiah of God.

This seems like a great time to remember what this faith community has been chosen to become, what our God-given purpose is:

What we ASPIRE to:



Who is left out of this vision?
 WHAT is left out?
 And doesn't thriving sound like FUN?

What we SEEK to become:



Let's unpack our Mission Statement.

What did the crowd in the synagogue do when they saw God at work?

They rejoiced!

Church should be like that synagogue!

A place to celebrate the awesome ways

God is creating, reconciling and

sustaining creation all the time, even in the midst of trouble and hardship, again, just like the folks at that synagogue living in occupied Israel.



In the Episcopal Baptismal Covenant, we promise to respect the dignity of EVERY human being.

Even people different from us. I offer the visual symbol of my clergy stole.

For a priest,

this is the yoke of Christ.

The pins came the same way
 litter grows –

you know, if there's one piece of litter and no one picks it up,
 more litter will follow.

One person gave me a pin, and I stuck on the stole.

Then more people gave me pins. They all have a story.

There are a BUNCH of different people represented here.

One of these is a pin from the guy in the US Army.

Another is a gay pride pin. The two people who gave them would NOT agree.

But, here they are, right next to each other on my yoke of Christ.



Here in this place, we share generously –
look at our newsletter over the months
and you'll see all the opportunities.

And this isn't just about money!

The people of this parish give THOUSANDS of hours a year
to share God's abundant grace.

I know, because we count those hours!

Many of our folks also share their time

with groups not connected to the Church of the Good Shepherd, but however people share
their God-given gifts, it's part of their mission as God's chosen people.



We nurture people's spirits in so many ways –
from systematic theology classes to Sunday School
to grief support to Bible study
to our new centering prayer groups
to providing space for 12-step groups:
we try to find ways to nurture EVERY spirit.

And, we love to say YES here;

if you have an idea for another way to do this,
let us know!



All together, this is what we're about here:
growing into a Temple dedicated to the Lord,
where Christ is building us into a place
where God lives through the Spirit.

It's what God has given us to become
as God's chosen people.



COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God, mighty and immortal, you know that as fragile creatures surrounded by great dangers, we cannot by ourselves stand upright. Give us strength of mind and body, so that even when we suffer because of human sin, we may rise victorious through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

JEREMIAH 1:4-10

The Lord's word came to me: "Before I created you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart; I made you a prophet to the nations."

"Ah, Lord God," I said, "I don't know how to speak because I'm only a child."

The Lord responded, "Don't say, 'I'm only a child.' Where I send you, you must go; what I tell you, you must say. Don't be afraid of them, because I'm with you to rescue you," declares the Lord. Then the Lord stretched out his hand, touched my mouth, and said to me, "I'm putting my words in your mouth. This very day I appoint you over nations and empires, to dig up and pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant."

PSALM 71:1-6

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be ashamed.

In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free; incline your ear to me and save me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; you are my crag and my stronghold.

Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.

For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence since I was young.

I have been sustained by you ever since I was born; from my mother's womb you have been my strength; my praise shall be always of you.

EPHESIANS 2:14-22

Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. He canceled the detailed rules of the Law so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace. He reconciled them both as one body to God by the cross, which ended the hostility to God.

When he came, he announced the good news of peace to you who were far away from God and to those who were near. We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit. So now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God's people, and you belong to God's household. As God's household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. The whole building is joined together in him, and it grows up into a temple that is dedicated to the Lord. Christ is building you into a place where God lives through the Spirit.

LUKE 13:10-17

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. A woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. When he saw her, Jesus called her to him and said, "Woman, you are set free from your sickness." He placed his hands on her and she straightened up at once and praised God.

The synagogue leader, incensed that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, responded, "There are six days during which work is permitted. Come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath day."

The Lord replied, "Hypocrites! Don't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from its stall and lead it out to get a drink? Then isn't it necessary that this woman, a daughter of Abraham, bound by Satan for eighteen long years, be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath day?" When he said these things, all his opponents were put to shame, but all those in the crowd rejoiced at all the extraordinary things he was doing.

SERMON HYMN: *Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness*

BLESSING: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.