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“Chosen and Kept in Christ”

Text: Acts 1:12-26; 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Alleluia! Christ is *ascended!* [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wonder if Joseph [*called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus*] was *relieved* when that lot with Matthias' name came out of the jar! Did you ever think about that? Whenever I've read this story before - about choosing the man who would replace Judas - I've always just taken it for granted that Joseph and Matthias *wanted* to be apostles; that they were both *vying* for this position - like politicians do in elections today. But maybe it wasn't that way at all. Maybe they were reluctant. Maybe they were filled with fear. Maybe they were both secretly hoping the other guy's name would come out. But someone had to do it. The Lord would have His twelve.

And I wonder why they cast lots to pick between them? Yes, maybe that was the common practice of the day and just the way they did things back then, but maybe there was more to it than that. Maybe after they whittled the list down to two - Joseph and Matthias - maybe at that point they were split, like we often are: the eleven split six for one and five for the other, or maybe the larger group of disciples split 60-60. And so to decide, they cast lots. ***Lord . . . show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.*** And the lot fell to Matthias who (tradition tells us) was eventually rewarded and thanked for his service of preaching the Gospel by being stoned and then beheaded.

Now I bring up that alternative way of thinking about that story because it was not only Matthias that was chosen to fill an office - *you are too*. All of you have offices, or callings, or places in life where God has chosen you to serve, and there are offices, callings, and places where God has not chosen you to serve. Sometimes you are a Matthias, and sometimes you are a Joseph. And maybe sometimes you want those callings you don't have and maybe sometimes you don't want the ones you do have and maybe sometimes it changes - at times you are happy with them and at other times it is just tough and you really wish the lot would have fallen to someone else. But it is you the Lord has chosen. And *His* choice is always the *right* choice.

But that's sometimes, frankly, hard to believe. It's easy to believe when things are going well. It's hard to believe when - like Matthias - the stones start flying because of where God put you and the calling He chose you for.

*But don't be surprised at that*, Peter says in the Epistle we heard today. Don't be surprised when ***fiery trials come upon you*** from a sinful and hell bent world. Don't be surprised when ***the devil is prowling around you like a roaring lion***, sizing you up as his next tasty morsel. Don't be surprised that in all your offices and callings and places in life - as a parent or a child or both; a care giver or a care *receiver* (and yes, that's a calling too); as a worker or student; married or single; healthy or sick; rich or poor; lots of friends or few friends; old or young; confirmand or member of the executive board - don't be surprised if there is cross and suffering. If it happened to the Shepherd, it'll happen to the sheep.

And when it does, do this (to paraphrase and interpret Peter here): If it comes because of your sin, *repent* and stop doing that. If it comes because of the sins of others, *forgive* and keep forgiving. And if it comes because of the name of Christ, *rejoice*, and know that ***you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.***

Now, to be honest, that's quite a different way of thinking than we're used to. We're used to thinking that *the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon us* should mean that bad things don't happen, that life would be easy, and that I would always be happy and content. And that's what we want it to mean, isn't it? And there is a glory like that - the ***eternal glory in Christ***, the *glory of the Son in the Father before the world existed*. And that glory is coming. But it is not yet. That glory will come, Peter says, ***after you have suffered a little while***, when ***the God of all grace . . . will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.***

But in the mean time, as we wait for our Lord to come again in that glory and take us to that glory - in the mean time, ***the Spirit of glory and of God still rests upon you.*** His Spirit given to you through water and the Word in Holy Baptism. But now, in this "in between" time, this time between Jesus' ascension and His coming again, now this glory is a different kind of glory. It is the glory of which Jesus prayed when He said: ***Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.***

That's a different kind of glory because ***the hour*** Jesus is speaking of there is the hour of His crucifixion. Jesus prayed those words, those words from the Holy Gospel today, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Earlier He had prayed: *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me* (Luke 22:42). Remove this cup of suffering, of wrath, of forsakenness. Jesus knew what awaited Him at the cross, that it wasn't going to be easy. But to give this cup was His Father's will, and so Jesus, the always and ever obedient Son, will take it and drink it down to its dregs. And so *not my will, but yours, be done*, Jesus says. And then after an angel comes and strengthens Him, His prayer changes to the words we heard today: OK. Let's do this. ***Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.***

Or in other words: *the hour has come for Jesus to fulfill His office as the sin offering offered to God for the sin of the world*. So bury me, He says. Bury me under the sin of the

world on the cross. Bury me under all the wrath the sin of the world deserves. Bury me in death in the tomb. And then fulfill Your Word in resurrection. ***The hour has come; glorify the Son that the Son may glorify you.***

Now that doesn't sound very glorious, but it is. For this is the glory of the Father: to send His Son to be the offering for your sin, that you might not die but live. And this is the glory of the Son: He comes not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom *for you* (Matthew 20:28). And with this God is glorified, for the cross shows us what kind of God we have. A giving God, a loving God, a serving God. A God who would rather die for you than live without you. A God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies. A God of atonement and forgiveness.

And so the cup of wrath and condemnation Jesus would drink for you, in your place, in order to give you another cup, a different cup: the cup of blessing; the cup of the New Testament in His blood, that gives forgiveness for your sins, life to conquer death, and salvation instead of condemnation. Take and drink this - His blood - He says, and live. Take and eat this - His body - He says, for the strength you need in this world. Strength to live in the offices and callings and places I will put you. Strength to repent and to forgive and to lay down your lives for others, and *so glorify God in your lives*. So Jesus prays for you, that you may do so.

And He prays more: ***Father, keep them in your name.*** He doesn't pray *keep them in your power* or *in your might*, but ***in your name***. It's the name we start every service with, the name we end every service with, the name put upon you when you were baptized: *the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. That name makes all the difference in the world, for it marks you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. It marks you as a child of God. It marks you as one who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit to keep you in the faith, to keep you safe from the evil one, and to keep you one with Him and in Him, no matter what this world and life brings.

Because Jesus knows it isn't easy. It wasn't easy for Him and it's not going to be easy for you. He's going to put you in some tough offices and callings and places in life, just like Matthias. Not to hurt you or harm you, but to bless others through you, and to bless you through them. And that happened to the other guy, too - the guy who lost the apostle lottery - Joseph. Though he was not chosen to be numbered with the twelve, or even with the seven deacons, tradition says that he too was killed for the faith. We don't know much about him after this, but he had his callings too and lived his Easter faith. A faith that gives a life that even death cannot take away. A faith that lives in the confidence of the empty tomb. A faith that knows that the glory of heaven is promised and coming, but that until then, there is no greater glory, no greater love, than to lay down your life for another.

That's what Jesus did for you. And while you may not think you're worth it, He does. He'd do it again, in fact! But He doesn't have to. What He does instead is give you the victory and life that He won for you over and over again. That as often as you fall, as often as you doubt, as often as you waver and regret and question . . . that your every sin be wiped away with His "I forgive you." That your every doubt be answered with His "I love you." That your every weakness be bolstered by His strength. That your every question be quieted by His cross. That your death be overcome by His resurrection. That your life be joyful and eternal.

For that's what Easter is all about. The *season* that this week is coming to an end, but the *reality and truth* that never ends, that is yours everyday, to every day remember and relive your Baptism, and die and rise with Him to a new life. Whether you are a Matthias or a Joseph. ***And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

For Christ is *ascended!* [He is *ascended* indeed! Alleluia!]

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.