Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our Bible reading focus is from Acts 1:12-26. Dear Friends in Christ,

To be the one not chosen, whether it’s for a team, a job, a club membership, a loan, or some other activity. It can be quite an embarrassing event in life. And we have all been there, we have all experienced it. Not being selected, we end up feeling rejected, we feel sorry for ourselves, and it’s a hit to our ego, our pride, and our confidence. In Acts chapter 1, we hear that both Justus and Matthias were considered as the one to replace Judas as the twelfth disciple. Matthias was chosen, and Justus was not. Justus knew the embarrassment of not being chosen for this position. Yet we know that Justus and every Christian are chosen by God to be among His beloved sons and daughters and to be witnesses to Him.

Theme: Each of us is special to God, for He chooses us even if the world does not.

There is a part of us that can relate to “the unchosen” Justus. Someone was needed to replace Judas as the twelfth disciple after Judas betrayed Jesus and took his own life. The apostles were gathered together during those ten days between Jesus’ ascension, which we was on this past Thursday, and Pentecost, which is coming up next Sunday. The apostles did not know when that outpouring of the Holy Spirit was going to come. However, they knew they needed to be at full strength, if they were going to carry out the Great Commission as Jesus commanded them. There were two men considered for the job—Justus and Matthias. Both men were qualified. Both had experience. Both had served faithfully. Both were deserving of the honor. Both were loved by God. They were both good men, but only one could be chosen for this position.

After casting lots, (equivalent of drawing straws) Matthias was chosen. Today, Matthias is remembered as a saint. He has his own special day: February 24 is celebrated as St. Matthias Day.

And Justus? Well, he is completely forgotten (sorry, but not really sorry). After this account in Scripture, he drops out of sight and is never heard of again. Being forgotten is what often happens when you’re the one not chosen. You’re sometimes forgotten, ignored, or considered a nobody.

I can’t help but wonder how Justus felt that day. Again, he was qualified, he had experience, he was deserving. One hundred and twenty of his fellow Christians said he was eligible, but Matthias got the job. How do you think that felt to be the “unchosen one”? To have them say, “No, Justus, not you, but Matthias.” Justus even knew that God had caused the lot to fall where it did. God chose Matthias rather than him. That had to hurt.

I imagine most of us can feel for Justus, because we all want to be the one chosen. Sinfully and selfishly, we want to be the favorite. We want to be the one everyone likes. We want to be popular, seen as someone others look up to. We want to succeed and live happily ever after. We want to be loved, admired, appreciated, and complimented. We want to be considered attractive and receive the honors and accolades when they’re given out. Many of us would like to be number one.

But in the world, we can’t all make it to the top. The base of a pyramid is much bigger than the top. A large company had an opening for 5 management positions; 1,500 people wanted the job and applied for it. But only 5 were selected. That means, 1,495 people were not chosen. Justus has a lot of company today.

Often, there’s no consolation prize. Ricky Bobby famously said, “If you ain’t first, you’re last.” We have “consolation prizes” or “participant awards.” Sometimes I’d even think that receiving a second place trophy, it only reminds you, that you’re not the best. You didn’t win. Someone else was chosen or performed better than you. Here, have a second place trophy so you never forget that you are second best.

Every one of us is at times the “unchosen one.” We can identify with Justus all too easily. The “unchosen ones” exist everywhere: the ones who didn’t have enough skill to make the team or good enough grades to get into college; the ones who didn’t get the promotion or the new job. Many businesses were “unchosen” as
essential businesses during this pandemic. Ask the business owner how essential their business is. Even the church was unchosen, and forced to close. Sorry Jesus, you're just not good enough. Many employees were unchosen as essential workers, and either laid off or furloughed. Right now, we really know this feeling of being unchosen.

But you know what, whether or not the world has chosen us for any special honors or awards, God by grace has chosen us to be His sons and daughters. To be chosen by God’s grace is the greatest recognition or award in life.

Time after time, the Scriptures remind us of our chosen status. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off’; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is 41:9–10). Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you” (Jn 15:16).

Paul described our being chosen in these words: “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thes 2:13–14).

By Jesus’ death on the cross, He shows us that despite your sin you are special to God. You are important to Him. You are the chosen one who is loved, forgiven, and saved by His grace. By the Holy Spirit, you are placed on God’s spiritual team, the Church. As members of God’s Church, you receive all of His benefits and promises, because of Jesus.

We are God’s chosen ones, and that is something wonderful! Imagine you’re at a large gathering of people, awaiting the arrival of an important guest. Everyone’s standing around, looking at the door for the special guest to come. Finally, he arrives. All eyes are suddenly on him. He seems so knowledgeable, so energetic, and so electric in his personality. You would love to speak to him, if only for a short time. Everyone in the crowded room is thinking the same thing. Now the guest’s eyes scan the room, searching. Suddenly, his eyes stop, he smiles, and he walks over to you. He extends his hand and introduces himself. You, of all the people in the room, have been chosen for his special recognition. Imagine your joy and excitement!

Words spoken to us can make a big difference in our lives. A coach says, “You made the team.” A teacher tells you, “You are an outstanding student.” A beloved whispers to you, “I love you.” In the words spoken to you at your Baptism, God says to you, “You are my child. I forgive your sins. You are now a part of my family of faith.” We, too, know the power of God’s words. Each one of us is His chosen one. When Martin Luther was tempted to put himself down or feel depressed, he reminded himself of his Baptism, which made him a child of God.

How many people, during this pandemic, do you think feel like they’re unchosen? What do you think you can do to help that person? Here’s an idea, feel free to use it. Think of two different people that you can call and say this: “Hi, I just want you to know that I was thinking about you, because I care about you, and I’d like to know, how are you doing with all that’s going on right now?” Those simple words can make a tremendous impact on someone.

Whenever you feel unchosen, unwanted, or unloved, you are reminded by the Word of God, that your value in God’s eyes is not determined by how many teams you’re on, how many awards you’ve won, how much money or stuff you have, or how others view you. Rather, your worth is given to you by God, who made you in His image and saves you by His grace. Never forget or doubt that in Christ, you are God’s beloved, forgiven child. He will never, “unchoose” you. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.