

Why in the world does God make the kind of choices he makes? Why does God choose to do things the way he does them? Sometimes, it makes no sense. Sometimes you want to ask, "What could God be thinking?"

Take his chosen people, for example. Ogden Nash has the one-line poem, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." And it's true.

Why would God possibly choose the Hebrews to be his own chosen people? If you were going to go back in time 3,000 or 4,000 years to choose a group of people to put your money on, you'd never pick the Hebrews. There were lots of other great ancient nations to choose from.

The Egyptians looked really good. They could really get things done. You can't build pyramids unless you've really got your act together.

Or you might want to bet on the ancient Chinese. The Shang dynasty and the great Zhou dynasty were organized and advanced.

Or maybe you'd bet on the Babylonians, or the Greeks, or the Romans. All of them were better bets than the Jews.

The Hebrews as a nation were insignificant. They were a bunch of semi-nomadic Bedouin-type sheep-herders. Their land was small. They kept getting conquered by their stronger neighbors. In terms of all our worldly standards, there was nothing special about Israel when God called them. They weren't powerful. They weren't especially religious. They weren't wealthy. They weren't highly educated. In other words, they didn't have any of the characteristics we associate with greatness.

Imagine going to the Kentucky Derby last week and taking your life savings to bet on the race. But you don't bet on the front runner. You don't even bet on the 30 to 1 long shot. Instead, choosing the Hebrews is like putting your entire life savings on the old broken-down horse that lives at some roadside petting-zoo a couple miles away from Churchill Downs. It's like putting your all your money on a weak horse that's not even going to be in the race.

That's the kind of bet God is making by choosing the Hebrew people. Why would God do such a thing? Why would God choose them? In terms of our standards, it makes zero sense. Yet, over and over again in scripture, God makes very strange choices.

Abraham is seventy-five years old, and his wife Sarah is far past the age of childbearing. Yet, God calls them to be the parents of a great nation that will bless the entire world. That's not something you normally expect. If you want someone to be a surrogate mother for you, you don't usually look for post-menopausal women.

Or take Moses. He's an escaped felon with a speech impediment. He has no skills in diplomacy or politics. He doesn't have a big staff of advisors or handlers or spin doctors. He

only has the staff of a shepherd. Yet God chooses him to go and face one of the most powerful men on earth, and to secure the release of the Jewish people.

The list goes on and on. In a few weeks we'll hear the lesson about God passing up all of the sons of Jesse except David, the youngest and the weakest. Jeremiah and Samuel are just little boys when God calls them. Mary is just a young peasant girl when the angel appears to her.

Or think of the 12 disciples. These guys were not the cream of the crop from any human standpoint. One was an anti-Roman terrorist. One was a tax collector, a Roman collaborator. James and John were more interested in themselves than in the group. Peter was impetuous, and eventually denied Jesus. And Judas betrayed him.

None of the disciples were trained in religion. None were experts in scripture. Instead, they were simply chosen by God.

When it comes to choosing, God's reasons often don't make any sense according to our standards. There are no outward qualities that would indicate that God made good choices in any of these cases. No business book written would indicate that God was following good managerial technique in choosing these people to serve him. But, these choices are not based on human standards. Instead, they are based upon God's standards.

St. Paul speaks of this in the 1st chapter of First Corinthians. Paul tells us that "God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important."<sup>1</sup> In other words, God takes our standards, our assumptions, our preconceptions, and he turns them on their heads.

God in his grace alone chooses and empowers and upholds a rather motley crew of folks to be his chosen servants in the world. In doing so, God gives us a VERY powerful lesson. It's not our own talents and abilities that make the difference. It is not our wealth that's important. It's not our education. It's not our power. Instead, the only thing that matters is how willing we are to let God's power work through us.

This morning, we read from the 1st chapter of Acts. Luke tells us that Jesus just has ascended into heaven. He leaves his followers behind. The odds are heavily against them. There are only 120 of them to go out and spread the good news to the whole world. That's a very small group with a very big job. Not only that, the apostles have a vacancy in their ranks. Judas is dead, and they have a slot to fill. With the odds stacked against them, they need the full complement of a council of 12 leaders to carry out their mission in the world.

So early on, the church has to pick Judas's successor. They nominate 2 guys to fill the vacancy, Barsabbas and Matthias. What criteria did they use to select them? What qualified these two men to become apostles?

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<sup>1</sup> 1Cor 1:28, NLT

Were they wealthy? Were they well educated? Were they extremely knowledgeable about Holy Scripture? Did they have management experience? Were they effective communicators? If they so, Luke doesn't mention a word about it.

Instead, for the early Christian Community there were only two things that concerned them. The qualifications Peter sets out in his speech are clear.

First, they are looking for someone who has been with them since Jesus' baptism. Someone once said that just showing up is often the most important thing we can do. First of all, they are looking for someone who has just shown up, someone who has been there, following Jesus since the beginning.

Second, they are looking for someone who has experienced the power of Jesus' Resurrection. They are looking for someone who can serve as a witness to the Good News of Easter.

The questions for the early Church in choosing a replacement for Judas were simple: Did they know the Lord Jesus Christ? And, had they been witnesses to his resurrection? That was all they wanted to know. And were told in Acts that they came before God in prayer, asking his guidance. And Matthias is chosen to become the 12th apostle.

God has chosen you as well. You're here this morning because God has called you to be here. Make no mistake about that. Just showing up is an important response to God's call.

But there's also the second part of the call—the call to serve. Yes, being here to worship God is vitally important. But God has a further call—to use your time, your talents, your treasure to do his work in the world—to use your resources to proclaim by word and deed the good news of his resurrection.

You may want to respond, "Me? I'm so ordinary." Exactly. God calls regular ordinary people like you and me to do his work in the world.

After all, ordinary people can do extraordinary things. This weekend we remember and honor the mothers in our midst. Motherhood is a rather ordinary job. Everyone has a mother after all. And yet the work is of supreme importance. A good and loving mother can make an enormous difference over the entire lifetime of her children. The seemingly ordinary role of motherhood gives the opportunity for an extraordinary demonstration of God's love for his children through the mothers in our midst. God calls ordinary people to do his work.

And in two weeks, we have a national holiday about ordinary people who answered a call to serve. On Memorial Day we remember those who simply showed up, those who answered a call to serve. Ordinary people, extraordinary sacrifice.

Having been ordained almost 23 years now, it's been my honor to do a large number of funerals for the WWII generation, the GI generation, the so-called "Greatest Generation." I guarantee you that these were very ordinary people. Yet, they did great things. On behalf of our country, they showed up when they were needed, and they served when they were asked.

Does the Kingdom of God deserve any less?

God has much work for us to do. There are disciples who have gone before us. And now, we are called to take their place. We are called to continue to work for the spread of the Kingdom of God.

Show up when you're called.

Serve when you're asked.

And testify to the power of Jesus' resurrection.