John 15:16-17 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will endure, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17These things I am instructing you, so that you love one another.”

Yeah, I saw those words about “choose me” and I immediately thought about neighborhood kids and playing games at school either on the playground or in gym class. And I will tell you that for me, especially in elementary and middle school getting picked to play with the boys was sometimes a painful process. There are a few factors involved in that. First, my best friend was a girl. That was a rather unpopular thing back in 4th grade. Second, I was not that good of an athlete. I had some natural abilities, but I had never really played any team sports like football or baseball or basketball. So knowledge and skill were a bit lacking. As a result of that, I would venture to say that in my earlier years, I was often the very last person picked to play on a team and there was a time or two when I was told, “The teams are full, so you can’t play!”

Yep, I know that feeling of not being picked. But I guess I had a bit of a different attitude. Instead of whining and moaning that no one picked me, I determined that obviously I would have to become a better athlete or player. So I did whatever I could to improve skills. I even remember sending for information from some comic book add that promised you that you could become a muscle man and never have to get picked on again. My Mom saw what they mailed me and nicely let me know I would not be sending them any money for their strength secrets. So I determined I would just figure out how to get stronger myself.

I did exercises. I did push-ups and sit-ups and I don’t remember what else. I remember my best friend’s dad (yeah, the neighbor girl) challenging my statement that I could do 50 push-ups. I dropped right there in their kitchen and did my 50. He just smiled at me and said he was glad I could do what I said. I can’t begin to tell you all the things I did to get stronger and better at athletics.

But I got stronger. By 7th and 8th grade I was picked in the top 5 for teams. I was stronger and as I got to play I learned and got better at the things that I played. If there was one thing I learned from that experience it was this: “If you don’t like what’s happening to you, then figure out how to make it so it doesn’t happen to you!” Seriously, I just learned that sitting and moping does nothing but make you miserable, so change, change yourself because we have that ability. It is a lesson that has had a great impact on my life.

Now I can’t say that at that time of my life that the lessons of God’s Word were a driving force and yet I can say that my Christian faith was there. As I grew and learned more and more about our Savior and what He has done for us, in time, that did indeed have a big impact on my life. One of the things that definitely caused an impact was grasping God’s love, God’s care and God’s calling us to be His children. It is still a lesson I cling to. Our theme: **CHOOSEN OF GOD!**

Of course, this idea of God choosing us instead of us choosing or accepting God is a big thing in Lutheran theology. It is big because it is a constant reminder that you are not responsible, you are not the factor in your eternal life and salvation. Take for instance the very opening words of Luther’s Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed. That Third Article deals with the work of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith that we get from Him. Luther starts his explanation in this way: ***“I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”*** It is clear by what Luther wrote that he doesn’t want you to think or feel that somehow you are in charge or that you are the one who made your faith what it is. Fact is, God is the one who has called you!

In our text for today we are simply told: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”** Do you grasp the absolute wonder of those words? There we were, earwigs before the crushing boots of the holy and righteous God and yet God does not crush and destroy, though we are the lowest of the low. (I mention earwigs because I just can’t think of bug that people dislike more than that one.) God is holy, perfect, pure, righteous, all-knowing and all powerful and we are ugly little bugs. But again, God does not crush and destroy. God picks us up. He chooses us. He puts us in his hand and delivers us to the safety of his love and compassion. God grants us the gift of faith and life just because of his love. Let that sink in.

Need a bit more help in letting that sink in? Be honest. Before the Almighty, all-knowing God how do you think you would compare? Remember God knows everything. He knows everything you’ve done, everywhere you’ve been, every thought you have had. He knows what was and what is and what will be and God even knows all the possibilities in between. God knows us thoroughly and truly. And still God picks us, God chooses us to be his.

If you need, go ahead and think in terms of all the kids lined up and getting ready to be picked for “The Team.” It is the most important, life altering day you will ever know. As you look around, you see or think you see, that everyone around you is clearly better suited, better qualified, a much better fit for “The Team.” And yet, God calls your name! He picks you. He calls you to be by his side and be a part of his eternal enterprise of life and salvation. He calls and names you!

Dear people, dear children of our Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus: This is what God has done for us. He makes us his children, grants us grace and love, mercy and compassion. He grants us righteousness and holiness, clothes us with salvation and purity, and grants that we be his heirs of all the treasures he possesses. God chooses us! Does this marvel sink in? This joy, this wonder, this awe of what God has done?

I pray it does. I pray you are impacted like I was the very first time I grasped this awesome truth of God. My eternal life does not depend on me. It is not about what I can be or do for God but always about what God has done for me. Yet at the same time I realize the absolute privilege this calling is. A privilege to grasp that God so loved me that he choose me. Jesus so cared for me and you that He suffered and died for our sins. Jesus made it and makes it possible for us to be the chosen children of God. Jesus grants forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus takes care of everything necessary that we might have that free, sure and certain, ticket to heaven. God has done it all.

Now I want you to notice the next line that is found in these verses we are looking at. It says, **“And appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will endure.”** God called you to faith, gave you the gift of faith, made you alive, caused you to see His grace and love, and granted you the status of eternal life as heirs of his holy and eternal kingdom. At the same time, God also called you to more. Our text says, **“To go and bear fruit.”** That is not something new. In the explanation of Luther that I quoted for you that truth is found in the words: **“enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”** In other words, God’s call, his gift of faith does indeed have an impact on our lives.

We can go. We are servants, friends, and children of the most High God. We let his light shine. We give Him glory, honor, and praise! We read, learn and inwardly digest his Holy Word, in other words, we like being fed and nourished through the means of grace, the very means by which God tells us He is going to work, move in, and change our lives. That nourishment and feeding of the Holy Spirit grants us the ability to produce fruit. That is God’s way of saying we serve him. Fact is, every type of plant in some way, produces fruit. The corn plant produces the ear of corn. That ear serves as food and that ear is also is the future of corn. It is true of every species of plant and animal found. They produce fruit because if you can’t produce fruit, then you will cease to exist. I want you to contemplate that simple and absolutely awesome lesson of God.

In our catechism works or fruits of faith are defined this way: ***“whatever a believer does according to God’s Word out of love and thanks for all of God’s goodness.”*** We serve the Lord. We want to please Him and in our best way show our love to him. We do this because we can’t help ourselves. God has made us His fruit bearing creations and it is what we do.

By the way, the next line answers a question that someone had in regard to the sermon on prayer and God’s will that you heard. I had said that God’s will and only God’s will is done with or without our prayer. You and I cannot cause God to do anything. A line of our text helps to clarify why that is true. That line says, **“The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”**

The Christian never asks anything that is not according to God’s will or God’s Word. We don’t ask God to do evil or grant us the strength to sin. We don’t seek out wickedness and what will destroy and harm our faith. That’s what it means to ask in God’s name. God’s name is all that is holy and pure, right and good, truthful and worthy. God’s name is always and only what God wants and desires, because as I mentioned last week, God’s name is not only everything God calls himself but it is also everything that God reveals about himself in his Word. The line doesn’t say you get whatever you want but says whatever God wants for you is granted. That’s because we are his chosen, his children and we want and do only what is in accord with the will and purpose of our God, or according to God’s name.

How are your fruits? I think that is always an interesting question to ask ourselves. Let’s view ourselves as a part of the vine of God. Yep, the idea that Jesus is the vine and you are the branches! What does Jesus say, **“A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine….because without me you can do nothing.”**

How are your fruits? Are you bearing fruit to the Lord? Can we see your grapes? Do we see the baskets of fruit that you provide and are? In this regard, if you were to visit a vintner and ask him what he would do with a vine that every year only produced one small cluster of grapes despite His work put into the vine and field what do you think he would say? Because you see, the object of the vintner is to get grapes, to have as many grapes as possible from each and every branch of his vine.

Because Jesus also says to us: **“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He (the gardener or God) is going to cut off. And he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will bear more fruit.”**

How are your fruits? Our fruits start with hearing, learning, reading, digesting and making God’s Word a part of our lives? Does God nourish us, take care of us, and grant us branch status if we are not connected to the vine? If you are not connected to the vine (Jesus) how are you going to have and bear fruit? So when I ask how your fruits are the answer will be in direct proportion to your connection with the Vine. We are connected to the Vine through his Holy and pure Word. So if you are not in church, not reading, not watching the stuff posted online, I think we can safely say your fruit basket might be a bit empty! Just sayin! Just want you to take it all in. Just want you to think about your calling and fruit bearing!

Because while God is the one calling, choosing, granting faith and sanctifying we do have the horrible ability to reject, scorn, walk away from and despise the Lord! We can deny Him. We can be empty of fruits and dead vines.

We are chosen of God. Jesus so loved us that he gave his life for us to give us forgiveness and eternal life. We have been called to faith. Called by the Gospel, the message that in Jesus we are His children and heirs of eternal life because of his victory over sin, death and the devil for us. He has done it all that we might be His and bear fruit to his glory. To God be the glory and praise. Amen.