**Weekend of Sunday, June 18, 2023**

**3rd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 11/Year A**

**First Reading: Exodus 19:2-8a**

**Second Reading: Romans 5:1-8**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:35-10:8[9-23]**

**Sermon Title: *“Chosen, Loved, and Empowered”***

**Theme**

*Moses tells the Israelites that they are called to be a priestly kingdom and a holy people. Jesus sends out the disciples as laborers into the harvest. In baptism we too are anointed for ministry, sharing God’s compassion with our needy world. From the Lord’s table we go forth to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, and to share our bread with the hungry.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Exodus 19:2-8a**

*At Sinai God assured Israel, “You shall be my treasured possession,” and commissioned them to serve as mediating priests for the nations. The people commit themselves completely to God’s will.*

2[The Israelites] had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.3Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”
 7So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. 8aThe people all answered as one: “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

**Second Reading: Romans 5:1-8**

*We are no longer God’s enemies but have peace with God because we were brought into a right relationship with God through Christ’s death.*

1Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
 6For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

**Gospel: Matthew 9:35—10:8 [9-23]**

*The mission of Jesus’ followers is to continue the mission of Jesus himself. Here, he instructs his first disciples as to how they might proclaim the gospel through their words and deeds.*

35Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”
 10:1Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.
 5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [9Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, 10no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. 11Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12As you enter the house, greet it. 13If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. 15Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.
 16“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; 18and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 19When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; 20for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 22and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”]

**Sermon**

I have entitled this weekend's sermon, "Chosen, Loved, and Empowered," three adjectives that are featured prominently in the three readings. We will take a deeper look into all three readings and I hope you see what I see; that these verses speak to us about God's call *(Chosen)*, God's transforming love *(Loved)*, and our mission as followers of Christ *(Empowered)*. Let's get started.

Exodus was the final and mighty event in the saga in which God set his chosen people, the Israelites, free from their slavery to the Egyptians.

If you recall the story, God observed the misery of his chosen people, the Israelites, under the hard duty of the Egyptians. God chose Moses to lead the people out of Egypt knowing that freedom would not be won easily. Yet Moses and the Israelites didn't really have to do anything. God did all the heavy lifting, delivering plague after plague on purpose, to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, to show God's divine sovereignty over the world. All the Israelites had to do was have faith in God. However, if you remember the story, the Israelites were constantly lacking in faith.

At every turn, the Israelites turned against Moses, God's chosen. Moses, in response, sought out the LORD, who delivered whatever need there was. But this cycle repeated several times, and each time God blessed his chosen people. We might wonder why God put up with these faithless people. But we can be thankful God was merciful because I dare say, we are often just as faithless.

The Exodus story is a story about the faithfulness of God. If an individual or a nation is chosen by God, God will be faithful. Jesus's parable of the vineyard workers affirms this. It doesn't matter when a person turns to God; that they have turned to God is all that matters. Or how faithful they have been throughout their life. It is enough that they turned to God in Christ, even if it was at the last moment. Such is the graciousness of the God we worship who has chosen us and made a covenant with us in baptism that God will never break.

What happens if an individual or a nation turns their back on God? The Exodus story indicates that God will be faithful to God's part of the covenant no matter what the other party does. For those of us who have been Christians all our lives, this may not seem fair. The Evangelicals even have a name for one who turns their backs on the Christian life – back-slider. But even then, the parable of the prodigal teaches us that God welcomes us back when we come to our senses. We should be thankful that God doesn't operate by our understanding of fairness.

The Second Reading from Romans reminds us of the incredible love of God. In it, Paul wrote, *8"God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."* You see, God's love is not dependent on our worthiness or our righteousness. It is a love that is freely given by God, even when we least deserve it. This love has the power to transform us; to make us new creations in Christ. And it is a love that brings us peace and reconciliation with God, and with each other in this life and hope for the life to come, and it is renewed every day.

In the Gospel Reading from Matthew, Jesus went throughout the towns and villages, where he healed the sick, proclaimed the Good News, and demonstrated God's love through his actions. He looked upon the crowds with compassion and recognized their spiritual needs. Then, after he called and trained his disciples, he sent them out, *empowered* to continue his work. Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal diseases. He told them, "You received without payment; give without payment." This is our calling as well, and through our baptismal covenants, we are empowered to freely share God's love and grace with others.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

We should not presume that our readings for the day are merely snapshots of the historical life and times of God's chosen people. To do that would miss the timeless message they contain.

These passages reveal to us a beautiful tapestry of God's plan for our lives too. We are ***chosen, loved, and empowered***. Just as the Israelites stood before Mount Sinai, we too stand in the presence of God. God is constantly inviting us to engage the covenant relationship God made with us at our baptisms; to be his faithful people and to follow the example of his Son and our Lord Jesus Christ, sharing his love, grace, and mercy with others.

God's love is not limited to our worthiness or our efforts. It is a love that surpasses all understanding. It is a love that takes our brokenness and makes us whole. In Jesus Christ, we find the ultimate expression of this love. He willingly laid down his life *for us*, bridging the gap between us and God. He took our sins upon himself and offers us forgiveness and reconciliation.

But the story doesn't end there. Like the disciples in the Gospel Reading from Matthew, we are chosen to be agents of God's love and healing in the world. We are chosen to share the good news, to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to minister to those in need. God has given each one of us unique gifts and abilities to fulfill this mission. It may be through acts of kindness, words of encouragement, or sharing the hope we have in Christ.

So with a renewed understanding that we are "Chosen, Loved, and Empowered," let us respond to God's call on us with joy and gratitude. Let us embrace God's transforming love and allow it to work in us and through us. As we leave here to reengage the world, let us remember that we are not alone.

The same God who:

* *chose* us before we were conceived and claimed us at our baptisms,
* who *loves* us as we are imperfect though we may be,
* *empowers* us to be his agents of God's love, grace, and mercy.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, today we are reminded that you chose us to be your faithful people, you love us even in our sinful state, and through your Holy Spirit empower us to do ministry in the name of your Son and our Lord Jesus. Now give us the will to be all this as our faithful response. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen