

Grace Lutheran Church

The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon

Sunday, May 6, 2018

Sixth Sunday of Easter - John 15: 9-17

*Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

Our Gospel lesson today speaks about a lot of things – one of them being friendship. Jesus said to the disciples, “I call you friends. I do not call you servants, but I call you friends.” Another theme, even more important, in our lesson today, is “love.” The love of which Jesus speaks is agape – the highest form of love – the love that gives away for the sake of the other. It’s the kind of love good friends practice with each other. Agape love is an act of the will. This kind of love is not something you fall into. This love is a choice – a decision we need to make to love. According to Jesus, with agape, expectations are involved. Jesus said – you are my friends – and as my friends – I am telling you – commanding you to love one another. And Jesus isn’t just a talking head who says whatever is convenient at the moment – Jesus backs up his words with truth. Jesus can tell us to love – he has that authority – that genuineness – because Jesus first loved us. It was on a hill called Calvary, overlooking the town dump. It was there he proved he was your friend and mine – he proved painfully that he loves us – as he laid down his life for his friends – you and me and everyone. Jesus chose you to be his

friend. Jesus loves you that much. How do you reciprocate the friendship? Here's how. Because Jesus chose to love us, Jesus wants us to choose to love him back. If I've said anything over the years that you remember – please let this be a piece of it. We keep all aspects – every jot and tittle of the law – rules – commandments about everything when we love God and when we love neighbor. Jesus told us that – plainly – He said plainly in Mt. 22: 36-40 that love supersedes any rule ever made or to be made – Rules, including life, property, family, marriage, health, creation – Anything. Agape love supersedes rules.

Jesus chose to love you. So how do you choose to love him back? By loving your neighbor. But first, let's talk about what it means to be chosen. What is the response to being chosen? Jesus chose you! Years ago, as I was growing up I had a wonderful baby boomer neighborhood – I've told you about pieces of it before in at least 10 sermons. Here's one more piece. There were 31 of us lads in the neighborhood – all kids within 10 years of each other. This incident took place around 1962-63. When I was young – 8, 9, 10 – we played ball, the older kids (12-13-14) would be the captains and they would choose sides. I – and all of us younger ones – would be chosen last – because the 12- and 13-year olds were better than us. Well, we hated that. But one day, Dave Mackey, one of the 13 year-olds – a good ball player – did something extraordinary. For his first pick, he chose me. And for his second, third and fourth picks he chose those boys and a

girl the same age as me. We never got picked in the first rounds. Davey picked the younger ones who weren't as good as the older ones. In terms of ball players in 1963 – in that neighborhood – he chose a very poor team – a losing team. And, how did Dave's team do? We lost. We didn't come close to winning. We were miserable compared to the older team. But I can tell you this – I played over a thousand ball games on the two fields in my neighborhood, and that's the game I remember. Why? Because we played our hearts out. And we did it – sure – we wanted to win – But that day we were playing – we were giving it all away – we were playing for Dave Mackey – why? Because he chose us!

Now, if Jesus wanted to win the religion game, he would have chosen the Pharisees as his first pick. They were pious people who oozed religion – praying, memorizing scripture, keeping all the rules. But who did Jesus choose? Not the religious people. No. Jesus chose fishermen – men who were earthy, rude, foul-mouthed, impatient, hot headed; and Jesus chose women who were plain ordinary, with no status at all. Jesus chose a tax collector. A man known to be a cheat and a thief. Jesus chose a zealot, a fanatic who wanted all the tax collectors stoned to death. And Jesus chose a woman who was mentally ill. That all must have made for some great conversation around the dinner table. And last, Jesus chose us – sinners – every one of us – us – known to be selfish, known to be mostly worried about ourselves and doing our best to create boundaries and borders that keep

others out of our club – and our club in control. So Jesus chose a team of poor players too. Because, like Dave Mackey, who wasn't concerned about winning that ball game, Jesus isn't concerned about winning the religion game. Because the victory over sin and death has already been won. So, now it's about playing the game and playing your heart out for Jesus. It's no longer about winning or losing. Jesus won. It's done. Even though you know the outcome, now it's about playing the best you can – leaving it all on the field for Jesus – why? Because Jesus chose you. And you planning as hard as you can, for Jesus makes a difference for players who don't feel chosen. And that's what Jesus wants you to play for. And, it's about having some joy and fun in the process of playing the game. What was it Jesus said – “So my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

Jesus chose you. He chose you to be his friend. Please respond to that by being a friend to Jesus. And what's that mean? I like to do things that please my friends. I like to please Jesus. How? I think Jesus nods affirmatively when I worship him. I think Jesus smiles when I use my time and talent and money for his church. And I think Jesus laughs out loud and says “yes,” when we work hard to include all people – when everyone feels loved and included, and when all have a place at God's table. And I think Jesus is giddy, happy and joyful when he sees all of us – we who know we have been chosen – when Jesus sees us live our lives –

play the game – in ways that show others that they are loved and that that they have been chosen too. I think that makes Jesus ecstatically joyful. *Amen.*