

John 15:16

Life is a series of choices. What time to wake up...whether or not to hit the “snooze button”...what clothing to wear...what to eat...how to respond to the comments of co-workers through the day. From the time we open our eyes in the morning to the time we close them again at night, life is a series of choices.

Most of these we make without much thought, but some choices demand more of us. It's not difficult to choose a box of cereal to open for breakfast, but choosing a spouse can be quite a process. Deciding which television show to watch is no big deal, but deciding where to go for a family vacation can be.

Did you ever stop to consider why we make the choices we do? We decide matters based upon what we like and don't like. We make decisions according to what we enjoy doing. If you did not enjoy a particular television show, would you choose to watch it anyway? No, you would watch a show you did enjoy...or you'd read a book. If you enjoy water sports, you would likely choose to vacation by a lake. If you didn't like spinach, you would eat something else.

So what is the final result of a lifetime of choices? In the end, what do all of our decisions do for us? We die. We draw our last breath and we die. And everything we chose to work so hard for is given to another. All the choices we make through our entire life come to a final, halting end in the grave.

Kind of depressing, isn't it? We live day after day making decisions according to what we like and what we think is best for us, but in the end, we can't take any of it to the grave. The clothing we enjoyed wearing, the food we liked, the memories of fun vacations will all stay behind when we die. We have no choice. We cannot continue to choose living. Because we are sinners, we are unable to choose life over death. We all must die. And because we are sinful people, every day we choose the wrong course...the wrong plan of action. We choose to disobey. We choose to be selfish. We choose to be self-serving.

We inherited this from our parents. And we die because our first parents chose to eat the forbidden fruit, and their choice sealed our fate. Their decision to disobey God infected us with sin, so that you and I live as sinners who make sinful choices our entire life, and then we die.

Is there any good news for us? Yes. Jesus says in John 15, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit.” Our hope is not in the choices we make, but in the choices God makes. Our choices end in death, but Jesus chooses life for us. Our choices show our sinful disobedience, but Jesus chooses to forgive our sins. We choose according to what we like and enjoy doing. That's not Jesus' way. He chose to suffer for you. He chose to be brutally beaten for you. He chose to bear your sins. He chose to go to the cross to be punished in your place. Jesus did not choose what was best for Himself, He chose what was best for you.

And it's not just that Jesus chooses what is good for you, He actually chooses you. It was not a stroke of luck that you were baptized in Christ Jesus. It was because Jesus chose you. He chose to make you His child in those waters. He chose to cleanse you there of your

sins. He chose to give you new life—eternal life. And it wasn't mere coincidence that you were then raised in the Christian Faith after your baptism. Because Jesus chose you, He brought you to where His pure Word is preached and taught. He instructed you through Christian parents, teaching you that God is your dear Father and you are His dear child.

You are here today not by chance but because God has led you here. He wants you to hear and believe the message that no matter how many wrong choices you have made in your life, God, in love, forgives you for Jesus' sake. And you are forgiven—not because you choose God, but because Jesus chose to die for you; Jesus chose to become the disobedient sinner in your place, so that you now, through Holy Baptism, are perfect and innocent in God's sight.

In a few minutes, Kenny, you will approach God's altar. You will be confirmed so that you can begin receiving the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament. Why are you here today? Jesus' words are the answer: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." You are not here because you made some great decision to live for Christ. It is Jesus who chose you. He who formed you in the womb; who called you to Himself in Holy Baptism; who taught you of His love and mercy for you, has led you here so that by His hand He now will feed you His own flesh and blood for your salvation.

Do you see how comforting this is? For you, Kenny, and for all of us...if the grace of God was dependant upon our choosing, upon our decision-making through life, we could never be certain of God's love for us—we could never know for sure that eternal life is ours. Because we are weak sinners we daily make the wrong choices, and all of our choices end up in the grave. We are too weak to choose life over death. We are too sinful to choose God over temptation.

How comforting that Jesus tells us it's not up to us. It's not dependant on how good a choice we make. It's not about how well we follow through on our decisions. It's about Jesus. It's about His choice to suffer, die, and rise again for you. It's about His decision to give you every gift of heaven in your baptism.

"I chose you," He says, and those simple words set our hearts at peace, for Jesus always chooses for our good. Jesus defeated sin and death, and so He gives us forgiveness and life. Jesus is strong enough to follow through on what He chooses for us.

When you stand up here, Kenny, and promise to be faithful unto death, you are not reaching down inside yourself to some great strength within you. Rather, you are simply trusting in Jesus. You can't choose Him. You cannot choose to be faithful to Him—but He has chosen you. He chooses to be gracious to you. And so you add the words, "I promise... with the help of God." He is your strength. He is the One who chose you to go and bear fruit—the fruits of faith. He will lead you through life. Through His Word and Sacraments He chooses to keep you always near to Himself. Every good decision you make as a Christian is Christ Jesus in you doing it. Every work of faith is your Savior bearing fruit in and through you.

Apart from Christ and His Word, you and I would only choose what is wrong. We would choose not to follow Him. We would live a lifetime of sinful choices and then perish in the grave. Be comforted, then, with these words of our Lord, "You did not choose Me, but I

chose you.” You, Kenny, are Jesus’ choice. You, dear baptized Christians for whom Christ died, are Jesus’ choice. No matter how wrong your life has been; no matter how poorly you have followed Him, Jesus forgives you. Every one of you is forgiven—you have His Word on it. And in that Word you have His promise to lead you through the grave into eternal life—the life He won for you by His death and resurrection, and the life He gives you, not because you choose Him, but because, in mercy, Jesus chose you. Amen.