

Year B 6<sup>th</sup> Sun Easter (Mothers Day)

No Options

John 15:9-17 – Theme: Christianity costs

*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain....*

*I chose you....*

And that's the problem, isn't it? We're backed into a corner. We didn't choose Jesus. He chose us. And, worst of all, he chose us for a mission: to go and bear fruit. I wonder how many of us think: "Thanks a lot! Couldn't he have picked someone else? Chosen someone spiritually classier than I am? Why me?" For some, this "choosing" business is like getting a notice from the IRS saying that they're going to be audited. You don't need this.

Yes, I know there's a sentimental side, a being-flattered side to have Jesus look at me and say, "You have not chosen me. I have chosen you." But after the initial modest blush, there is, I think, a certain anger, or at least an annoyance not too far below the surface, because deep down, we know we've been boxed in. And truth to tell, we don't like it. I mean, the bottom line is this: once I'm chosen, once I'm tagged, once I've been given the baptismal uniform, so to speak, then my options as a Christian are limited. And I, raised in a society of endless choice, in a consumer culture that caters to my infantile fantasy of no parents, no rules, and no limits, resent that.

After all, all day long through massive advertising I am brainwashed by the silly seductions of endless options, and conned by the fantasy of an open-ended lifestyle: "The world has boundaries. Ignore them" is the motto of Isuzu; "No limits" (Foster Grant); "Life without limits" (Prince Matchabelli); "No rules. Just right" (Outback Steakhouse); "No refs. No rules. No mercy" (NFL video game); "Rules? What Rules?" (IBM); "The rules are for breaking" (the Spice Girls); "When I'm in uniform I know no limits" (a recruitment ad for the US Army— pretty scary if you remember Lt. William Calley in Vietnam).

But along comes Jesus, and once we put on the uniform of discipleship we *do* know limits, we must know limits, and limited options are spelled out. We're stuck. Two examples:

The reporter was interviewing an old man, a grandfather who was obviously still in intense grief over the shooting death of his teenaged grandson. The grandson had been shot during a robbery of the family's little neighborhood grocery store. "Do you want revenge on those who did this?" asked the reporter. "Would you like to shoot the person who shot your grandson?" The old man looked astonished at the question. "No, that's not possible," said the grandfather. "I guess you don't even know for sure who did this," said the reporter. "No," said the grandfather. "It's not that. It's that we are Christians. We are not permitted revenge." There you are. Case closed. Options limited. No getting even, no plotting to kill, none of the beating to a pulp or maiming or murdering so dear to our TV and movie messages. **We're stuck. Chosen Christians are not permitted revenge.** We're boxed in by mercy and forgiveness and the example of the Master who chose us.

Pastor William Willimon tells the following story: When I was a pastor and was on my way out of the church late one afternoon, I was chagrined to see a rather forlorn-looking man with a small bag—a wanderer, a vagabond, a drifter, a bum—coming down the road toward the church, seeking a handout. Well, this is what you get for having a church situated near a highway. These drifters come through occasionally, seeking a tank of gas for their trip, a meal, a gift—preferably in cash—for their journey to who knows where. They always have some sad story of woe to tell but the end is always the same: Can you spare about \$25.00 in cash?

I sighed as I watched the man approach. It had been a long day. I had to return for a meeting that night, and I was anxious to get home. I decided that I would meet him at the door, head him off, give him the only cash I had—a mere \$15.00, as I recall—and then send him, and me, on our way. "What can I do for you?" I asked with some annoyance in my voice. (This was not one of my better moments; I'm not proud of this.) "I wondered if you might be able to help a fella on the way South," he said. "I was headed down to..." "Yes, yes," I said, interrupting him. "Well, I'm in a bit of a rush. So here is all I have. A five and a ten. That's all I've got."

The man took the money as I offered it. Looked at it. And without a word, he turned and headed out toward the street. Then he stopped and turned toward me

as I locked the church door. "I guess you think I'm supposed to thank you, to be grateful," he said with a surprising tone of defiance. "Well," I said, "now that you mention it, a little gratitude wouldn't hurt." "Well, I'm not going to thank you. You want to know why?" he sneered. "Why?" I asked. "Because you are a Christian. You don't help me because you want to. You have to help me because he (now thrusting his finger up into the air) told you to help me!" And then he left.

I stood there, stunned, angry. The nerve of these people! On my walk back to the rectory it finally hit me. He was right. I was snookered in by the faith. I really had no choice. No options. I was a chosen one.

To be a Christian, you see, chosen by Jesus, means that there are some things for us which are not optional. A person who is a member of the Sierra Club is not a person who sets forest fires. A member of the Boy Scouts cannot be someone who refuses to build a campfire. It goes with the territory. Doing Christlike things and not doing unChristlike things goes with being chosen.

We're caught. Of course, we can bow out—and some have. We can disconnect and say, "No thanks. You may have chosen me, but I do not choose you. I decline the honor." There's a certain honesty to that. Worse, though, is to keep the connection and at the same time keep those options open that make Jesus weep: to keep the label and choose those things that make Jesus ashamed of us. That's traitorous and dishonest. To be a chosen Christian and never say, "I can't do that. I'm a Christian" or "I must do that. I'm a Christian" is to live a lie.

**If we are chosen, people should be able to tell.**