

Pentecost 21 –October 22, 2023

Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Theme: Congratulations! You have won the election!

When I was in 8th grade, I ran for President of the Student Council. I ran hard! I had an election committee. I had signs and posters. I was giving speeches in the lunchroom. I fought harder for that than just about anything I have ever strived to do, and I lost. In fact, I lost by a landslide. I lost to a popular, pretty, little girl who could not string together three coherent thoughts on her best day. That was when I learned that elections have little to do with how good the candidate is and far more to do with how popular and how attractive they are. I never ran for another office in school.

Last summer I was elected to my third full term as Midwest Vice-President of the English District. But believe me, I have no fantasy that it has anything to do with more than name recognition. Having been in Chicago for 19 years, mine is a well-known name in the Midwest and that is what keeps getting me elected. It's not that I am popular, and I am certainly not winning on looks. It's just that for the past 9 years, I have managed not to mess anything up too badly and people know my name.

Elections are strange things. We say that our Bishop is called to be Bishop but we place a term limit on him. On the other hand, pastors are elected for life. I warned the call committee of that

when I visited before you called me. That's why even when a congregation and a pastor are at odds, he cannot be fired because he was never hired. He was elected by the congregation for life. I think the difference between the election of the Bishop and the election of the pastor is spiritual. The office of Bishop is an ecclesiastical office created by the Church for good order. Therefore, it can be regulated by normal earthly rules like term limits. The office of Pastor, however, is created by God and like marriage, is for life, or until God decides otherwise. Therefore, it cannot be regulated by earthly rules and norms.

All of these ponderings about this idea of election are important because of our Epistle for today. Paul is writing to the new Christians in Thessalonica. They are still figuring out this business of being Christian. I would imagine that the average Thessalonian saw being Christian as something similar to joining a club. They might think, "I used to belong to the Club of Venus and now I belong to the Club of Christ because my wife made us switch to a more wholesome club." Sadly, I think that too many people still see it that way. Church is just one of many clubs to which a person might belong, and if the Church demands something I don't want to give or confesses something I don't want to believe, well, I'll just change clubs.

Paul reminds us that when it comes to God, things work differently from the world. First things first. You did not join this club. Neither did I. We were elected, by God. When we passed through the baptismal waters, God chose us to be His forever. That is predestination. God destined us for paradise. Paul says, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

Then, you, as a group of predestined Christians voted for me to be your pastor. Through you, God called me to serve Him in this place forever, or until He says otherwise. In 110 years, this body has elected six pastors to be their leader and I am the sixth. Our election to this club is not based on popularity or name-recognition or beauty. It is based solely on God and His plan for us.

What this means is that there is nothing left for us to do to gain salvation. God chose us. Paul said it.

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Do you hear the confidence Paul has in the Word of God? He does not timidly suggest that maybe the Thessalonians might want to consider, you know, if

they have time, they might want to consider joining the Jesus club. And by the way we have great potlucks and terrific golf outings! No, he's not trying to "sell" Jesus. He knows that he and other pastors proclaimed the truth to them and he knows that the Holy Spirit is powerful in God's Word and that they have been elected!

Congratulations! You have been elected!

It wasn't based on our works, but rather on the will of God. However, having been elected, our works will reflect God's will. Having been elected, and thus having had faith created in you through the Word and Holy Baptism, your faith will produce good works. In fact, if you didn't want to do good works, honestly, you would have to work to stop the good works from flowing out of you. But why would you want to do that? Having been elected, now what you do to serve God is a labor of love. The Holy Spirit moves through your faith to empower you and encourage you to do work for the kingdom and if you're anything like the prophet Jeremiah, you can't stop yourself! You just have to serve.

It wasn't easy for the Thessalonians. They lived in a world similar to ours, very secular. People picked and chose what they wanted to believe. People changed associations whenever there was a more attractive offering somewhere else. But Paul is confident. In fact Paul says, they have "steadfastness of hope." Is that what you

**have? It is exactly what you have. You have been elected for life!
You have been chosen to be in God's family and the Holy Spirit has
created in you the faith to believe that Jesus Christ paid for all your
sins when He died upon the cross. That faith produces works in you
that play out in the Church and in the community and we have
"steadfastness of hope" that the day will arrive when Jesus returns
and takes us to our eternal reward, and that is the final joy of having
been elected.**