

## 10.08.23 – Pentecost 19

### “Divine Selection”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Numbers 9:1-4; 10:1-8 (CEV- Contemp. Eng. Vers.)**

<sup>1</sup> During the first month of Israel's second year in the Sinai Desert, the Lord had told Moses <sup>2</sup> to say to the people, “Celebrate Passover <sup>3</sup> in the evening of the fourteenth day of this month and do it by following all the regulations.” <sup>4-5</sup> Moses told the people what the Lord had said, and they celebrated Passover there in the desert in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. <sup>10</sup> <sup>1</sup> The Lord told Moses: <sup>2</sup> Have someone make two trumpets out of hammered silver. These will be used to call the people together and to give the signal for moving your camp. <sup>3</sup> If both trumpets are blown, everyone is to meet with you at the entrance to the sacred tent. <sup>4</sup> But if just one is blown, only the twelve tribal leaders need to come together. <sup>5-6</sup> Give a signal on a trumpet when it is time to break camp. The first blast will be the signal for the tribes camped on the east side, and the second blast will be the signal for those on the south. <sup>7</sup> But when you want everyone to come together, sound a different signal on the trumpet. <sup>8</sup> The priests of Aaron's family will be the ones to blow the trumpets, and this law will never change.

**Leader: These Instructions Are from God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **2 Peter 1:3-11 (CEV)**

*Living as the Lord's Followers*

<sup>3</sup> We have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. It was all given to us by God's own power, when we learned he had invited us to share in his wonderful goodness. <sup>4</sup> God made great and marvelous promises, so his nature would become part of us. Then we could escape our evil desires and the corrupt influences of this world.

<sup>5</sup> Do your best to improve your faith by adding goodness, understanding, <sup>6</sup> self-control, patience, devotion to God, <sup>7</sup> concern for others, and love. <sup>8</sup> If you keep growing in this way, it will show that what you know about our Lord Jesus Christ has made your lives useful and meaningful. <sup>9</sup> But if you don't grow, you are like someone who is nearsighted or blind, and you have forgotten that your past sins are forgiven.

<sup>10</sup> My friends, you must do all you can to show God has really chosen and selected you. If you keep on doing this, you won't stumble and fall. <sup>11</sup> Then our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will give you a glorious welcome into his kingdom that will last forever.

**Leader: These Words Come with God's Authority.** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we thank you for the birth of two babies to the children and grandchildren of our members. We appreciate the joy they bring amid the carnage of Israel's new war against extremist Hamas. May we use this time and these lessons to secure our sonship of faith and salvation because of you and your sacrifice on the

cross. May we understand and remember our calling to baptism and belief, knowing that although we freely chose you, we also were called by you to faith. Then stir us Lord to serve you joyfully in the work you give us to do. Fill us with your divine power and nature as we recommit our faith, hearing your Words and your voice as you speak through this servant. Amen.

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Last Sunday's Old Testament passage, Jeremiah 29:11 could have also been used for this week's sermon title, Divine Selection: "11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The exiled Israelites were in Babylon, but this week, it is an earlier generation of exiles. They are in the second year of their journey into the Sinai desert in Egypt with Moses. The first part of Numbers is a sort of instructional operations manual from God. The first several chapters are a census of the people, job descriptions, and details of how they should relate to one another on the long journey; remember there were over 600,000 fighting men on the journey and well over 2 million people over the 40 years. How would one camp such a large group, or serve Passover, or worship God?

So, they needed an ops manual. It was written in the first month of their second year, after the tabernacle was completed. Because of the plagues that had befallen the people and the harsh travel conditions, many had touched the dead; that compassion to care for their dead had made them ceremonially unclean. The Lord had commanded Moses to observe all their religious rituals along the journey, including Passover, but they would need a significant communication system to prepare themselves for Passover. The Lord instructed Moses' craftsmen to make two special trumpets that could signal the people to continue the march. The Hebrew Scriptures tell of three kinds of instruments. The ones in this passage are

called *chatsotserah* (חֲצֹצְרָה): silver instruments in the shape of a long slender tube with a flared end. The trumpets like the ones on the bulletin cover, the correct ones, should not be confused with the shofar, the animal horn I brought back from Israel. The shofar was typically used as a signal for war, either the beginning of one, the end of one in victory, or to denote the freedom brought on by a battle's new territory gained.

These silver trumpets had a different purpose. The blowing of these trumpets was not just a skill of musicians, although skill was needed, but it was the responsibility of the **priests**: “<sup>8</sup>The priests of Aaron's family will be the ones to blow the trumpets, and this law will never change.” In Numbers 3:12-13, the Lord anointed Aaron's line to the priesthood, and presented the tribe of Levi to Aaron. The Levites (priestly tribe) were commanded to help Aaron perform his priestly duties. This included taking care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting in the early days of the journey, and doing the work of the later tabernacle, according to the different clans. This priestly tribe was selected by God for certain duties.

As you heard it read, if one trumpet sounded, only the clan leaders were required to be present for a meeting. When both trumpets were blown, all the people were to gather at the tabernacle entrance; this may be where the tradition of church steeple bellringing came from. With a different pitch, the eastern division of tribes could depart toward worship. Yet a different call would alert tribes in the South. Imagine their camp set up like a box with the tabernacle in the center. The defensive nature of the camp meant that the clans surrounded the tabernacle. Remember, in this Exodus, the people were chosen by God as his own; they were selected.

Becoming your pastor involved a selection process on both sides. I selected you at this church and you went through a selection process to choose a new pastor after Wayne Yawn's retirement. A Presbyterian pastor who resigned recently in the pandemic's "great resignation" asked why anyone would want a pastor's job describing it as CEO, professional speaker, counselor, fundraiser, human resources director, master of ceremonies, pillar of virtue, and for us here, a property manager—all in one position! As I approach five years of service in February, my tenure has been an unusual one: 2+ years of COVID-19 impact and my own health crisis of a few months. You and we weathered it all very well though!

As I have been cleaning up papers, I was reminded of some early goals and accomplishments. For Pastor's Appreciation month, instead, I want to appreciate you, our **congregation**, for giving me a chance to learn how to be a better pastor. I don't have to blow a trumpet! But I am allowed to sing, organize, pray, study, manage, and of course lead. The way it ties into our subject today is the concept of "divine selection". Although yes, I have skills as Lisa shared at my installation, but more importantly, I am **called** to this vocation, even when it gets hard. I have become more resilient thanks to the challenges of 2020 and this past May; resilience comes from my faith in Christ and my strength comes from the incredible support I have in you, this congregation, my friends, and my family. So let me figuratively blow the trumpet of gratitude, love, and grace. I could not be your pastor without God's grace, mercy, and love. We have so much more Kingdom work to do together! And I am ready

because I was selected, you were divinely selected, and we both are continuing to grow in spiritual maturity and resilience.

That's what Peter was trying to encourage in the early believers in this second letter—spiritual maturity and resilience. At this point in time, Christ has risen and ascended to the Father; his disciples are scattered. He blesses his readers first, then challenges them to participate in the Divine Power and Divine Nature of Christ. In the 2 Peter passage from last week (2 Peter 1:12-21), we did look briefly at verses 5-7: “<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” Doesn't that sound like Galatians 5:22-23? “<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

You cannot just add these things to your character if you desire; we must be open to receiving them so the Holy Spirit can transform us to build these qualities into our lives and habits. Faith alone is just the beginning; the spiritual disciplines of prayer, study, silence, hospitality, contemplation, Scripture, and healthy personal life rhythms of exercise, nutrition, good sleep, and quality time with friends prepare us to **accept** being divinely selected. If we do not combine our efforts with God's, then we are an empty shell or a puppet. Being divinely selected is both a rewarding joy and a burden at times.

Let us not abandon the reward of being selected to be God's children and God's chosen. Your lives are the evangelism tools others can witness; they can see Jesus in you if we allow God's Divine Presence to

motivate us and shine through us. We are already cleansed of our sin, and we have strength beyond our imagination. We must not let culture hinder our work or our love for this community. As our anthem said today, let us awake to the love and work God has for us here in Annandale, Falls Church, Alexandria, and Fairfax County. Are you ready to love more? Are you ready to work more? Amen. ||

**Please pray with me.** Divine Presence and Selector, we seek you this morning and every day. Help us to be living examples of your divine power and nature so that others can see you through us. Help us to be more aware of you through Scripture, prayer, study, and each other's encouragement. We thank you for this divine community and calling. Help us to share your love and resilience with others who need it now more than ever before. In your Son Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**