

Sermon - October 4, 2009

## **We Are Who We Are By God's Decree – Calvin Says the Bible Says**

Genesis 12:1-7, Romans 8:28-39, Ephesians 1:3-14

John Calvin was born in 1509, and 500 years later his teaching about God and Human life and the Bible, God's word to us about both, Calvin's teaching still speaks powerfully to the issues of our day and our lives.

And it is fair to say that central to the power of Calvin's influence was his conviction that he had nothing new to say to the world – he had simply to say, in ways that would and could be heard and believed, what the Bible, God's word, has to say to all God's people always.

Calvin made no claim for his views, but by his views he sought to help God's word make its claim on the minds and hearts of God's people.

In all things he sought to give honor to God who he believed made all things possible in his life. And central to his faith – and ours – are 5 key teachings –

Total Depravity – which I spoke about last Sunday. We're all sinners. I suspect you have your own evidence of that fact from your life, and the lives of some folk you ran into this past week or almost ran into you.

Unearned Election - God's love for us is not because we are so lovable, but because God is love.... My focus this morning...

Limited Atonement – Irresistible Grace – and Perseverance of the Saints – which we will talk about in the next two weeks.

And the first letter of each idea spells - Tulip. A flower to help us remember – in the best of times, and the worst of times, who we really are because of God's love for us made known in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Lord – you have given us this day, and every day we are privileged to live. May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, give us new understanding of Your word to us and of the way You would have us live in Christ. Amen.

Unearned Election - Chosen by God, because the God who is love, loves us. Chosen for Good and not Evil. Chosen not because we are good or not good. Chosen because God is good. And that good news - at the heart of the teaching of John Calvin - frees me from fear in life or in death – frees me to choose as wisely as I can what to do in my life, knowing that in all things God is working for good. It gives me a kind of peace even in the face of life's ups and downs.

It lets me cheer intensely for the Tigers and Lions and Red Wings and Pistons and Shock and yes – the Spartans - and – in the end – to know – wins or losses - in the biggest game of all - I have been chosen to win.

This is what I want to think about with you this morning. Those Bible verses we heard - that talked about God who chooses - chooses us. I want us to think about what it is that brings us to this Table this morning, to break the bread of love, to drink the cup of salvation. Who are we?

What has made us the persons we are who have chosen to be here? What experiences, contacts, friendships, wins and losses, family influences, DNA, have helped shape who you and I are – and what you and I do?

Calvin says the Bible says it's all God. Life is all about God at work in all things for the Good of all. Calvin says - God chooses us – calls us. Every step we take in life, every move we make, is first of all the result of God's will at work in life and in our lives. We live and move and have our being because of God's action. Whatever we do, whatever happens to us, it all begins and ends with God. And that is very Good News. Because – God is Good.

There is another view of life - not Calvin's - not mine – not mine at least when I'm thinking clearly. The other view - that everyone in life is his or her own person, and everyone gets in life what he or she deserves, earns, merits.

This is the more popular view in our day – though I suspect this near depression time has more us wondering just how much in charge of our lives we really are. I hope I'm not too much in charge. I hope this is true for my sake – and I think – for your sake, too.

When I see the way life plays out each day – I pray the end result of it all does not depend too much on me. That life, the end and meaning of my life, rests most on God's love for me and God's promises for me, than on the way I live my life.

And that's the promise in Calvin's word about God's word - unearned election. God loves us – calls us – even to this place – because God is God – and not because of how good I am.

This can be a troubling idea - God chooses - God controls. So - We are just puppets – huh? And so this Calvin, Presbyterian thinking, has not been so popular of late among free thinking, do my own thing, make it on your own - Americans.

We'll do the choosing in life. Thank you. That's our pride. But there are signs – so many signs of late - that we are not fully in control of our own lives or destinies. That in the end our end will depend on more than we can control.

Why are we here? Here?

Because of all the decisions each of us has made since our first breaths? Did we bring ourselves here? Or are we here because of the world God created and because of God's power at work in the world and God at work in our lives in so many ways? The rain that changed plans for yesterday, my doing?

The date of my birth and that my life has been cast in pleasant places? All my doing? No. And I welcome this truth – that my life, my destiny, rests most of all, first and last of all, not all in my own hands at all, but in God's plan. The truth that I have been chosen by God to be God's person – that I am here because all things are working together for good - and for my good.

That even if and when all things in this still sinful world seem to break against me – a job is lost, a loved one gone, health weakened - though a host of things be against me - I know I am chosen - elected – and God is for me – It's why I'm x here - God at work in my life, and so I know nothing, nothing in this world can separate me from that love.

And here is the strange wonder of all of this. While God chooses us – brings us by God's power at work in our lives to this place, brings us here by God's self-giving, sin bearing, death enduring and defeating love in Christ Jesus

We are still free to act, to make real choices day by day about how we will live. Yes – it might be true – that the flap of a butterfly's wings in China has some undetectable influence on the wind I feel on my face today –on this world wide communion Sunday – But it is still the Butterfly who flaps his wings.

By God's action my life has been cast in this pleasant place – not Bagdad, or Kabul - And by God's grace I have the power, the responsibility to flap my Wings - to use whatever gifts I have of time and talent – and cast them on the side of goodness and light and love.

Chosen - I am called - To Choose - to be a part of this company of faith – To receive these symbols of God's love for me, God's election of me to be one of God's own. God has called you here - chosen you to be God's own. Come and be filled anew with the Spirit of the Living God – that you might be all God made you to be – God's very own. Amen.

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