

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost • June 15, 2008

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Exodus 19:1-8

“Elected”

Had you heard that it's an election year? Though it may seem hard to believe, this election season started over a year ago, with almost a score of possible candidates declaring their intent to run for election to the office of President of the United States of America. Party primaries have been conducted, debates debated, and delegates committed, but we don't yet have a winner – no official election has taken place, and we still have five months to go! What's the point of all this? Why would a candidate subject himself or herself to the level of scrutiny and slander that is so often part-and-parcel of a Presidential election? Through our country's electoral process, one person will be elected to serve a four-year term as what is often called “leader of the free world.” Are the candidates seeking to serve or looking to lead? Ideally, they intend to do both in equal measure. Either way, though, these individuals have spent years planning and preparing for election.

Now flash forward five months to Election Day: voters turn out in record numbers, and commentators wait and watch to announce the results. The votes roll in, the polls close down, and the results come out. The next President of the United States is: you! Due to an unforeseen groundswell of write-in votes – and in some cases unexpected changes in electoral law and the Constitution – your fellow Americans have elected you to the highest office in the land! I'm not sure what your reaction might be, but I'm fairly certain that *my* response would be, “What?!?! But I never asked to be elected!” Being President looks like a pretty demanding, thankless, career-ending job – just look at how worn-down past occupants of the Oval Office have seemed after a term or two. Sure, the President wields a significant amount of power as leader of the United States of America, but as *Incredible Hulk* creator Stan Lee once wrote, “With great power there must also come great responsibility.” Imagine having all that placed upon you, without ever asking for it, or even having been asked!

You *have* been elected without anyone asking. Everyone to whom the Gospel is proclaimed is part of that elect – though, tragically, many reject God's grace. You see, God chose *you* to be His own. And in that regard, you share company with Moses and people of Israel. God elected Abraham and his descendents, the Hebrew nation, without their asking, too. God called up, and they followed. It seems that God has this way of electing people that you'd think would be screened out by background checks: Moses, a murderer and a fugitive; Matthew, a reviled tax collector who helped support the Roman occupation; and then there's you and me. What must God be thinking? What does He expect might happen with these people?

God elected Moses to lead his people. To serve as His personal representative to the descendants of Abraham, to whom the Lord had made a covenant promise. Through Moses, God brought these people, who are now encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai in today's reading from Exodus, back to the same mountain where He'd revealed Himself through the burning bush. Only three months earlier, these same people saw with their own eyes how God brought them out of Egypt, passing through the dry bed of the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) with a wall of water on the right and on their left. Like a mother eagle, the Lord has carried His people on mighty wings and has caused them to come to Himself. Moses, who has been elected by God to serve as the people's mediator – the go-between – now does just that, going up the mountain while the people make camp. Here, God reiterates His decision to choose the people as His own. He has elected them to office as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. The people, like Moses, have been called to serve and to lead. Like Moses, they are to bear witness to God's message; however, God has chosen *them* to be His representatives *to the entire world*. Talk about responsibility!

You and I have been elected into the same office as the Hebrew people. Like them, we often abandon our responsibilities. God calls His people to hear and obey His voice: in order to keep the covenant, we are to live as a holy people. We were chosen to tell people about the only God – who creates and sustains everything around us, the God who loves us – not just through the words of our mouths but also through the works of our hands, through the love that we show to our neighbor. We abandon our responsibility as the elect when we make choices that go against our office. When you or I go out and act in a manner that is counter to God’s instruction, either in public or in private, what kind of witness are we giving? We have been called to lead and to serve. Who are we serving, and where are we leading those who see our actions and hear our words?

Due to the nature of his elected office, the President of the United States is held to a seemingly higher degree of accountability as the representative of the American People. The President lives in the spotlight over on Pennsylvania Ave.: leaders, journalists, and analysts the world over examine his every action or decision. And should the President break the law of the land that he’s been elected to serve, he may be impeached and cast out of office. Like a lawless President, we deserve impeachment when we disregard the authority Who elected us in the first place. So why don’t Christians – those who are honest about their failings, at least – live in fear of getting kicked out?

As with any significant election, there’s a scandal involved. Christians bear witness to that scandal in the cross of Jesus, where God performed a mightier work than the parting of a sea. There, God impeached Himself: God the Son, Christ Jesus, willingly took the fall for those of us that have failed to hear and obey our Heavenly Father’s voice. For you and me, Jesus, our mediator with God, accepted the guilt that was ours along with the corresponding punishment, separation from the Father and death. And because Christ rose from dead, we, too, may live without fear as His elect.

As God’s elect, you have been called to an office of great importance – and this is good news. Because of the cross, you are God’s treasured possession. All of creation is His, but He considers you to be special. Our Father, having brought you to Himself through the Holy Spirit for Jesus’ sake, will not leave you as you go out into the world.

That’s what living as the elect it all about: as we go out into the world, we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, serving and leading. Considering that, think about where you find yourself in life this day. Are you one of our high school graduates, going off to college or work as a Christian in hostile world? Are you a parent, raising your child while facing choices about how to manage your finances? Do you find yourself in a hospital bed, not knowing what the next day may bring? In all these things, you will bear witness to the God Who has made you His own. Like others who have been elected in this world, you’ll probably want to seek advice and direction, and God the Holy Spirit stands ready to do just that, pouring the love of God into you. Turn to the pages of Scripture to hear God’s voice, living and active in guiding you as you live as God’s elect. For with God, all things are possible.

Congratulations – the vote is in, and God has chosen you!

Amen.