The subject today is what it means to be chosen. We are God’s chosen people we say. Or God has chosen us in some way. It’s the name of the series on the Bible that some are interested in. So let’s think a little bit about what that might mean to be God’s chosen people.

In the late afternoon I usually get on my exercise bike for a while. And there is a show on once in a while that I really like to watch. I can’t explain it, but I just like it. It’s called Forge in Fire. And it’s about these guys, I think it’s usually guys (sorry gals if I’ve missed it here) who come in to the forge and out of nails or whatever metal the judges choose, forge a knife, or a sword, or a blade. So the show is about craftsmanship at least in part.

But what really makes the show work, is the whole business of being chosen. And so there are the judges and it’s their job to choose. They stop the blade making process at several points along the way to decide. At first, they have to choose which person is making the worst blade. And that means they have to leave the forge. But when it’s down to two people the judges choose which person made the best blade. And that person is chosen to be Forged in Fire champion and get a check for 10,000 dollars. Everyone shows up because that’s what they want. That’s what they are chasing. To be one who is chosen.

I don’t know how it works here in the schools, but I remember the way we would pick teams to play basketball at recess or kickball. And we would line up up in just the same way. And the process of being chosen was very important. If you were chosen first, that was a good thing. It meant you were the best. And if you weren’t chosen until the end, everyone knew what that meant. With kids sometimes, if it comes time to pick someone to do something, it’s like instant chaos as they scramble to the front and almost demand to be chosen. So this whole business of being chosen is very important to us.

It’s a touchy subject. Even if it’s for something that no one wants to do, it can easily get personal. It’s why we have elections. To see who is the chosen one. When I have visited people at the Homestead House, I have asked countless times to get on the pastor’s list, so I could go and do a service there. And for some reason I just can’t get on the list. Right, there is certain of group pastor’s I guess who are the chosen ones. You know what I mean. Chosen can be cliquey. It’s often implies privilege. It implies status, importance. It can mean that your better, above, more qualified. Chosen can also imply that if you are chosen, that means that other people are not chosen. I’m chosen over you. Chosen can be about who likes who. Who is the bachelor going to choose? We have to think about this word maybe, and what it means to us, when we say that we are God’s chosen people. And if we’re not careful, being chosen can become a real ego trip.

So let’s get in to this a little bit. Our Gospel lesson is a portion of the first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Luke. His first words are to the devil, but these are the first words to regular folks. So this is important, how is Jesus going to begin his message? What is he going to talk about? And interestingly enough, Jesus begins by pointing out who have been chosen by God.

So let’s set the context. A report about Jesus has spread far and wide, and at this point Jesus is being praised by everyone. Jesus is a celebrity now, he’s famous and now he’s coming to his home town. So you understand I’m sure what that would feel like to the people of that town. It would be a source of pride to them right? An ego boost. Hometown boy makes good. In other parts of Scripture, we read that nothing good came from Nazareth. So we can try to imagine the boost this town would get from being Jesus hometown. They’ve been chosen. They’ve been singled out, chosen by God, to be the hometown of Jesus. Pretty cool. No other place is going to be able to say what they now can say. They’ve been a gift that no one else will ever be given. A status, a priviledged position that no other town will ever be able to have.

So how does it all go so very wrong then, so very quickly? Well, it seems there is a problem with thinking that being chosen is primarily about status maybe? There’s a problem with thinking that being chosen means that other people are not chosen. What kind of person might that turn you into if you think about the word chosen in that way? Could make you a little arrogant right? A little smug. A little cocky maybe?

Well, this explains I think why everything goes south so very rapidly. These people like being chosen, when it means that others are not. They like it when it gives them status. But turn the tables and see what happens. What will happen when these folks are not chosen, and others are? Everything is great, it’s a big love in until Jesus begins to tell them about the widow at Zarephath in Sidon. She was the wrong race. She was the wrong religion. The wrong country. But in a time of famine God chose to bless her with grain that never ran out. Jesus hometown never got that. Then he tells them about Namaan the Syrian whom God chose to cure of his leprosy, when no one in Isreal got healed. No one in Jesus home town got that. See what they’ve done to being chosen? They’ve turned it into a position of priviledge. Totally happy that they are chosen when others are not. But furious if others are chosen and they are not.

In other words, they don’t see at all, that to be chosen is to humbled. That to be God’s chosen people is to be brought down a peg or two. To be chosen is to be brought low. That’s our lesson today. We need to think carefully when we say that we are God’s chosen and what the signs of being chosen are. The people in our lesson today, say to Jesus “Do the great things you’ve been doing elsewhere here”. What Jesus does is give them one of the greatest blessings they could possibly have. He humbles them. And they try to kill him for it. We really do have to consider what it means to be chosen by God.

Jesus was chosen by God. And it led to a cross and greatest humiliation one can imagine. This is his first words. Last week heard that the chosen were the poor, the captives, the oppressed. This week it’s people of another race, another country, another religion. And this was, and always has been the great obstacle to God. We often just want God on our side. This is the greatest danger. We just have a hard time being humbled.

But without getting too heavy, perhaps we can get a glimpse of what Jesus came to bring with just the little, small, humiliations that happen every day. Maybe we can just start there. Like the other day, I couldn’t find my phone. And I must have spent a half hour looking for my phone. It was in the coat pocket I was wearing. I put it on the other side. The other day, I got this piece for a car jack that I have so I can lift up my car from the front. And I had to take this hex bolt out. It was really on there, so I got out my impact wrench to get it off. And it just wouldn’t come off. And I’m just cranking away on this thing. I had it on tighten instead of loosen. I fired up our new livestream unit this week. And the screen was just black. Nothing. I was just baffled, messing around. I left the cover on the camera lense. It just never ends does it.

This is a big part of our journey? Being humbled. Does sharing these things together separate us, or connect us? Do they drive us apart or begin to bring us together? I think it usually begins to bring us together, make us real. I think this is a big part of what it means to be God’s people. It gets more serious, deadly serious at times. You can get a divorce and that’s a humiliation. You get old and your heart starts to flip around. You can drop the easy pass. People can say things that are deeply humiliating. Your church can get smaller. Every week we come and say that we’re in bondage to sin. And one of the things that happens if you are God’s chosen is that throughout your life you grow in a deeper awareness of exactly what that means. I know the old country song says, “O Lord, it’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look in the mirror I get better looking each day”. Not really. Luther used to say that the Gospel was nothing more than the story of Jesus and his humbling. But in many ways, it’s our story too isn’t it?

You don’t have try to be humble. Don’t say, I should be more humble. No, don’t do that. Believe me, humility will just come to you. We just get humbled, in a lot of different ways. We don’t choose humility, it chooses us. It just happens. What if we learned to see this as a sign that we are chosen by God? Jesus humbles his hometown folk today, because they are chosen. To walk a path of learning what it means to live in God’s grace and love. They want to thrown him off a cliff, but maybe we can do better. See, I think that’s what Luke is after today. What it means, is that I will be taken on a path that humbles me, so I can start to be real, and connect to others, and to God. And maybe haven taken that path I might be more like the famous words in our 2nd lesson today. More patient, and kind, not boastful or arrogant. Especially about being chosen. Amen.