

Chosen Ones Choose God

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, July 23, 2015.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Amen.

Chosen. It's an interesting term. For instance, we say certain people are "chosen," as the best candidate for a job, the recipient of an award, a target of bullying. It's a term that denotes a kind of distinction. Certain people get selected for a given purpose while others just don't make the cut, most often because the chosen one exudes certain skills or qualities that stand out from the rest. In some instances, the chosen one might leap for joy at an opportunity to shine. Yet in others the chosen one may shy away in an effort to preserve her or his safety, privacy, or well being.

If you'd known me during my college days, you would have met an enthusiast of Joss Whedon's television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. My friends and I got a kick out of the way Whedon used mythic creatures and situations as metaphors for real-life struggles, besides creating in Buffy Summers, the lead character, a new kind of feminist hero. Buffy wasn't just a sly, witty, sassy teenage girl interested in fashion, boys, and hanging out with friends but she was also The Chosen One, the latest in a line of young women imbued with an ages-old power to battle demons, vampires, demi-gods and other creatures of darkness. While combating these forces by night, Buffy would try to maintain a normal high school girl's life by day. Being the Slayer wasn't a role she'd chosen for herself; it had chosen her. Not easy. There were many times during the series

when Buffy expressed her desire to be “unchosen,” to renounce her duties in order to avoid being different. Being the Slayer was, to her, a curse.

I wonder how (and I use this term loosely) the “chosen ones” of our readings this evening—Moses and Jesus’ disciples—felt about their higher callings which set them apart from the others around them. Did they feel privileged? Cursed? Maybe a little of both? Did they ever want to renounce their following of God’s call? I can only imagine that for Moses as well as the disciples, abiding by God in a world where many did not must have been a mixed bag, an honor as much as a challenge.

As intermediary between God and the Israelites, Moses straddles two worlds. He’s kind of like Buffy in that regard. He’s one of the people, and yet there’s something that sets him apart, a “power” or an ability to directly communicate with God. It’s a gift the other Israelites don’t have. They can’t go up to the mountain top. All they can do is hear and feel the thunder that shakes Mount Sinai. Moses, on the other hand, hears what’s beyond the thunder—the voice of God, which summons him to the mountain top. And Moses goes up. He’s willing. He answers. And because he answers, he hears differently. Moses is open to and understands God in a way that the people don’t. Unlike Buffy, he doesn’t curse his unique position. He doesn’t ask God “Why me?” He just does it. Still, I wonder, why Moses? Why does he get to have this ability and position?

I ask the same about the disciples in our gospel from Matthew. Like Moses, they go higher, deeper. They possess the ability not only to “hear” but also to “see” the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus has let them in on. The disciples, like Moses, are set apart from those who cannot apprehend Jesus’ message because the larger crowd’s “heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes.”

The disciples are different, and Jesus calls them blessed for having the eyes to see and ears to hear differently. They get his teachings. But why them?

It's not that Moses or Jesus' disciples are more special to God than anyone else, or that they have superhuman powers. What sets Moses and the disciples apart from the rest is their willingness to follow God. It's their choosing God that makes the difference. I'm sure each Israelite and person listening to Jesus' parables hold similar potential. They just don't choose to open their hearts. They don't choose to see or to hear or to understand or to connect with God.

One must first choose God in order to understand the wonder of being God's Chosen. That was a lesson I stumbled into when I first came to St. Paul's. I'd been battling some of my own forces of darkness, and, like the character of Buffy, I saw myself as cursed. I asked "Why me?" Besides that, I'd been searching for God and, despite my various attempts, had not yet come to fully know or see or hear or experience—until the day I first set foot through those doors behind you. The whole of the place was inviting and irresistible; it radiated good energy. So I sat. I meditated. I prayed. I connected. Whether within this sanctuary or in the labyrinth and healing gardens in the back, the presence was real. I kept coming back, first to compline services and then, *avec courage*, to Eucharist on Sundays. Again, that presence. It was hard not to feel it. Or to feel welcomed by it. And the more I opened up to that presence, the more I began to see and to hear, the more I understood: I was loved far much more than I ever thought possible, and I opened my heart to this Source that loved me as I'd been created.

God chose me in that time and place for a long-overdue experience of radical welcome, healing, and reconciliation; but it couldn't have happened without my eyes

opening to look and my ears to listen. The power was always in me. I just had to grow willing to open my heart and tap into it.

Buffy's power to battle the forces of darkness becomes, by the series finale, one that every young woman has—a stored potential. I think the same can be said for the Israelites as well as the crowd to whom Jesus spoke. If only they'd open themselves, they'd understand God. They'd be doing the work of Moses or of the disciples. The same is true for us.

In the end, we're all God's Chosen Ones. None of us are cursed. No one is more special than another. God rests in each of us whether we acknowledge this truth or not. We each *do* have the power to see, hear, and understand. We *can* be—and *are*—blessed. Why not open up it? After all, relationships are reciprocal. If God chooses us, why not choose God?