



**“Being Promoted”**  
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**St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church**  
**San Antonio, Texas**  
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**John 15:9-17**

Robert, you went to boot camp. Before you went to boot camp when you signed in to the Army you got a chance to choose your MOS, didn't you? Yes! You chose from a whole list of things, didn't you? Absolutely! How many of us have gone to college? Now, how many of us had a choice of where to go? Yes, about the same hands. Some of us didn't have a choice. You're going to go there and that's all there is to it. And that's okay. But you also had a choice, or most of you had a choice, to choose what you were going to study. Pretty much all of us did. The joy in that is that you get to choose what interests you and to follow that pursuit because it becomes a passion for you.

Students in Jesus' day had the same opportunity. As a matter of fact, most folks that wanted to study the law had the opportunity to choose which Rabbi under which they would like to study. If they wanted to be like, say, one particular Rabbi and his offerings or his perspectives on the law they would choose to study under that person.

It didn't happen with the disciples though. They weren't looking to go to school. They weren't looking to have a change of MOS. They were chosen, if you will. Jesus chose them for a particular reason. He had in mind what they were to be doing for the rest of their lives and to have it make an impact upon the whole world. Pretty profound, don't you think? One person choosing a group of others so that they would actually change the world. I don't think that any of those twelve had that kind of ambition and yet look what they have accomplished.

It's an interesting thing to think about being able to choose your profession, to choose your school, to choose your teachers when we register for classes. Don't we do so? I know I did. I spent too many years in college to not know whose professor or which professor had the right kind of reputation that I wanted to study under. No term papers, I want that one! No finals, I want that one! It's an interesting thing to be a student and to choose where you are going to go and to choose what you are going to study and to choose how you will learn and spend the rest of your life, but it's a totally different thing when that is chosen for you and I don't mean just school, I mean what you are to become.

We talk about this an awful lot when we talk about discipleship, what it means to be a student of the Gospel, a student of God's word in Jesus Christ. But something happens in this passage of scripture. Did you catch it? It's very subtle. Jesus said to the Disciples, "I no longer call you disciples or servants. Students, he says, "you are my friends." Friends! You are done being students. You are done learning, now do! You've been promoted. And this promotion is something that we don't quite fully grasp, I think, today in our church and not just St. Andrew's, I mean in The Church. George made allusion to it in his prayer that the United States has become the mission field for Christianity. It's hard to believe, but you know we're so used to sending missions overseas to Africa and to Asia and to all those places. They're sending missionaries here because we need it, desperately.

But there's a change in this and I want us to be very clear about the word friendship or the word friend when Jesus uses this. He's not talking about what we call friends in the twenty-first century. We're used to calling everybody our friend. You know, where everybody knows your name. We're used to calling friends, you know – "listen, friend, I don't want to mean any harm to you or

how's my friend today?" That's barely scratching the surface of what the definition of friend really is according to this word. This is not an acquaintance. This not someone - oh, you know, I know him. Yeh I know him, I've seen him. We were just talking about that a little bit ago, weren't we? I mean Danny and Mary and I were talking about the person we've hired as our new church secretary and they think they know her. Well I can't tell you who it is because the Staff Parish hasn't voted on it yet, but we talked to her about it. They think they know her because she's from this area and I think I know that person, I know who that is. That's an acquaintance. We are acquainted with them. We know about them perhaps. We know a little bit about them. Maybe we even know them casually.

That's not the friendship Jesus is talking about here. It goes deeper than that. And the change that Jesus is promoting here is not just a subtle change between student to acquaintance, it's between disciple, one who is to become like Jesus, into being one who is like Jesus. The notion of a disciple becoming a friend - it's different, it's deeper, it's not just an acquaintance. Somehow when Jesus does this and he talks about being chosen - I chose you, because you know when we choose that makes us consumers, doesn't it? We get to choose which school we'll go to. We get to choose just like we choose our groceries. We get to choose what clothes we wear. We get to choose our friends. We always tell our children that - choose your friends wisely, you ought not hang out with that kind of a person. There's a consumerism in there.

But when Jesus said, "I chose you." you didn't have the option and there's no consumerism in this friendship. This is not an option. You are mine. I chose you and I've appointed you. I've given you a task to bear much fruit, to bear lasting fruit, fruit that will have an impact upon the rest of the world history. You are going to change the world. That's a strange thing for us to think about. We struggle with that notion that we are here to change the world. No, not me, I'm just a preacher. All I'm supposed to do is marry and bury and baptize or as we say in seminary, hatch, match and dispatch. That's my task. I'm not supposed to change the world. Oh, really! No, no, I'm just on the board of trustees. All I'm supposed to take care of is the air conditioning, light fixtures and... I'm not supposed to change the world. No, no, I just sing in the choir, I'm not supposed to change the world. I'm just here to do... I just teach a Sunday School Class, I'm not here to change the world, no not me, uh-uh it can't be me.

But when you are chosen by Christ that consumerist ideal, the idea that you could choose to do this or not to do this is removed completely. You don't have a choice. When you are chosen by Christ, when you've been called by God; when you've been created and redeemed and sustained by God, there's no choice in it. You are done so because God has a plan for you. To go against that is to go against God.

Now, that makes us really uncomfortable because suddenly the world that we have grown up in which is all about choice, it's your choice, you choose to do so, choose your friends, you must choose wisely. The problem is that when you've been chosen, well you can get into trouble there, too, because when we get chosen we think it's because of a particular reason like we're particularly smart or handsome or loving or good-looking or because we deserved it somehow and there's a sense in which we tend to want to become the elite. Oh no, I'm a part of that church.

There's no elitism here. There's no real reason why God chose us except for the appointment for which God has given us. I appointed you, Jesus says, to bear much fruit, lasting fruit. I've called you. I've chosen you and I've appointed you to change the world. And you know how to change the world. You're not going to like this. It's a simple answer. I know our world and we don't like simple answers because they are too simple. There's got to be more to it than that, there's just got to be because this doesn't make sense, it's not enough. We want more detail. We want it to be lined out step by step by step by step so that we can follow it and say, "See there, I told you it wouldn't work." It's real simple - love one another. Don't you hate it when that happens?

Jesus gives us the whole clue and tells us what it is, “love one another just as I have loved you” and you know what, he even defines that kind of love just in case you were wondering. “Greater love hath no one, this is the kind of love I’m talking about – greater love hath no one than to give one’s life, to lay one’s life down for a friend and you are my friends if you do as I’ve commanded you.”

So it’s a conditional kind of thing, isn’t it? It’s an unconditional love with one condition. You have to love. That’s the only condition there is, to love as Jesus has loved us. And it follows, by the way, it’s one of those domino things – God loved Jesus, Jesus loved us, therefore we love one another. Did you see that? It follows. It’s all in there, in this little passage. You didn’t think this passage was that profound, did you, but it is. You’ve been promoted. You’ve been promoted from being a servant to being a friend, not just an acquaintance. It’s not just knowing who God is in Jesus, it’s not just knowing about Jesus, it’s not just knowing what Jesus has done years and years ago, it’s about knowing him intimately and being willing, being willing to lay down your life. Do you want to change the world and see the world the way God wants to see the world? Love one another. Love one another as He has loved us.

My friends, if you thought you were only a recipient of the grace of God, you have just been promoted. You are not only a recipient you’re a transmitter, too. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!