

Predestined (Chosen or Called)

Rev. Dewey Johnson, Pastor Emeritus

"You didn't choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit..."

- John 15:16

I think it was back in the 1700s when the following e-mail circulated. "Those Presbyterians! They believe in *predestination*. Believe that God has picked only them to go to heaven and live in the Pearly Gated Community. The rest of us have reservations at some place called the Bates Motel. Forward this e-mail to three of your friends and alert them to this heresy so they can pray with the rest of us that God will strike the Presbyterians with a sense of somberness, making them do everything decently and in good order."

Obviously, this prayer was answered. However, if the Puritans and Quakers and Roman Catholics who received this e-mail had actually done a fact check, they might have discovered the following. Being chosen to go to heaven, while everyone else isn't, is a really poor way to understand *predestination*. If Presbyterians believed such a thing, we really would be heretics.

The biblical concept that we Presbyterians actually stress is that of being *chosen* for service. God *chose* Israel from all the peoples on earth to serve by bearing witness to God's presence and power in the world. And then God *chose* the church to go to all the peoples on earth and serve by bearing witness to God's presence and power in Jesus Christ.

Christians, and not just Presbyterians, have been *chosen*, or, if you must, predestined, but for service, not privilege. The privilege or glory will take care of itself. Jewish comedians understand this concept of service rather than privilege. Their favorite line is, "God, I know we're the chosen people, but once in a while couldn't you choose someone else?"

I bring this up because David Brooks recently wrote a Presbyterianish article in the *NY Times* titled, "Why America's Leadership Fails." One reason, he says, often overlooked, is that the political system drains good people of their sense of vocation. Their public service becomes a career. What's the difference? **In what follows, the words in parentheses are mine.**

"A career is something you choose. A vocation is something (say, following Christ as one is equipped) that you are called to (or chosen for). A person choosing a career asks, How can I get the best job or win the most elections? A person summoned by a vocation asks, How can my existing abilities be put in service of the greatest common good?" (God, how can I best serve Jesus?)

"A career is a job you do as long as the benefits outweigh the costs; a vocation involves falling in love with something, having a conviction about it, and making it part of your personal identity. (I have chosen to follow Jesus!) A vocation involves promises to some ideal (baptismal promises), it reveals itself in a sense of enjoyment as you undertake its tasks, and it can't be easily quit when setbacks and humiliations occur. As others have noted, it involves a double negative – you can't not do this thing.

"People with a vocation mind-set have their eyes fixed on the long game. (Say, the coming of God's kingdom.) They are willing to throw themselves toward their goals imaginatively, boldly, and remorselessly. (For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.) People who operate a

career mind-set, on the other hand, often put self-preservation above all. Nothing gets done because everyone's doing the same old safe rigid thing." (*Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead*, said Jesus.)

Brooks can imagine a turning away from careerism to vocation. And wouldn't that be great. In Christianity, we call this repentance.

So, does it make a difference if you believe in being predestined? It does, so long as it is chosen or predestined for service. It does when serving Christ, as God has equipped you, is your vocation.