

Order of Worship for 7/11/21 8:30 AM

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening hymn: *“God Has Spoken by His Prophets”* – Hymn #583

Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Amos 7:7–15

R: This is what [the LORD God] showed me: behold, the LORD was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the LORD said, “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.”” And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people.’”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: Lord God Almighty, Your law places a plumb line by us.

C: How does it look? Will You see us straight following our commands, not just the ones about avoiding evil, but also the actively love our neighbor as You love us?

P: It isn’t just what other people see. You also hear our words—how we put down others, how we try to get around the truth, how we push off our faults on others.

C: You look into our hearts and see our jealousy of others, our lusts, our indifference to others, our dwelling on petty matters.

P: Our lives are so crooked.

C: And like Amaziah with Amos we try to push You away. Our lives say to You, “Just go way!”

P: O LORD how can we stand?

C: Lord, have mercy on us.

P: In His great love God sent His Son to take our place. On the cross He took the punishment that we deserve and instead of seeing our sin, the Father sees the life of Jesus perfectly straight by the plumb line. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen. Thanks be to God!

Entrance Psalm:

P: For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!

C: In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!

P: Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy!

C: In Your faithfulness answer me, in Your righteousness!

P: Enter not into judgment with Your servant,

C: for no one living is righteous before You.

P: Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love,

C: for in You I trust.

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!

C: In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day:

P: O Lord, You granted Your prophets strength to resist the temptations of the devil and courage to proclaim repentance. Give us pure hearts and minds to follow Your Son faithfully even into suffering and death; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Hymn of Praise: "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" – Hymn #793

Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 1:3–14

R: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:14–29

P: The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark, the 6th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: King Herod heard [about all this], for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children's Message:

Sermon Hymn: *"Lord, 'Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee"* - **Hymn #573**

Sermon: "Chosen by Christ Jesus"- Ephesians 1

The rock group "RUSH" wrote the song "Freewill" which goes like this:

There are those who think that life has nothing left to chance
A host of holy horrors to direct our aimless dance
A planet of playthings, we dance on the strings of powers we cannot perceive
The stars aren't aligned or the Gods are malign, blame is better to give than receive
You can choose a ready guide in some celestial voice
If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice
You can choose from phantom fears and kindness that can kill
I will choose a path that's clear, I will choose Freewill.

These words express the desire in our culture to have freedom, to have the choice to make what we want of our lives. Philosophers are traditionally divided into two groups—"determinists" and "indeterminists." "Determinists" believe that everything is already decided by the forces of nature. Nothing is just chance. "Indeterminists" say that there is free will, then we are free to choose what happens in our future. Even though science has shown strong links to why things happen like finding out that genetics has more to do with our

decisions than the choices we make, our emphasis on personal freedom has led to a development of “determinist” philosophers who say that are “conditional” determinists, that though there are limits to what we can or not choose, we do have some free will.

I do not want to get too deep into philosophy, but the problem is which one is true? On one hand if everything is determined, then why worry about anything? We are just pawns who are not guilty for anything we do wrong. On the other hand if we are free to do what we want, then why do we need God?

In our culture most Christians feel that though we sin, we have free will. We can decide whether or not to follow God. But how then do we account for what Paul says in Ephesians?

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

“Predestination”—also called “election”—is the word that can strike us as we hear Paul’s words. Predestination is determinism—everything is already decided in advance. We are simply like computers doing what we are already programmed to do. It is the belief on Muslims who always remind themselves with the word “Inshallah” that everything is predetermined by their god Allah.

That doesn’t sit well with us who value so much freedom. A week ago we celebrated the 245th birthday of a nation that defends “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” If you have such a determinist view of things, then it is so tempting to want to ensure that you are on the right side of God’s choice—you want to prove that you are God’s elect. So when we think of that view of predestination, then we rightly picture in our minds the legalism of strict Muslims or the Puritans and their witch trials in New England.

But Paul’s words remain—“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world,” “He predestined us.” “We have been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

Martin Luther wrote a ton. There are 54 thick books in our church library of his works. Yet he said that you could throw them all away except for two works—his Small Catechism, which many of us know from confirmation class, and The Bondage of the Will. Luther wrote that book in response to The Freedom of the Will written by Desiderius Erasmus, the most noted scholar in the western world 500 years ago. Erasmus wrote that we do have free will to choose to follow God or not. Luther blatantly spoke against that. Luther didn’t say that we are simply puppets who do what is predetermined. I can choose whether or not what I want to eat today or whether or not I want to go to work tomorrow. But in terms of our relationship with God we have no choice. It is in the same letter to the Ephesians that Paul tells us, “We were dead in our sins.” Dead things can’t make choices. As sinners we are slaves to sin. The only choice we can make is to go against God. That is totally slavery to sin and death.

But “God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.” We who were trapped and bound in our sin have been given life as God the Holy Spirit has worked faith in us. Paul says, “In Christ you, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed by the Holy Spirit.” Faith is not our choice, but God’s gift to us. We who were slaves are now free to follow God. In Christ we now have free will, the will to follow Him.

The problem always with predestination is the question, “Why are some people saved and not others?” We could say with Muslim that God makes the decision. But then why bother with faith in Jesus? Or we can say with most Americans, and as Erasmus did, “We make the decision.” But then our salvation depends on our choice. It leaves our salvation open to all kinds of doubt.

“God chose us in Christ.” “He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.” “In Christ we have obtained an inheritance.” Paul never speaks about election or predestination apart from those vital words, “in

Christ.” God does not spin a wheel or take a token out of a spinning cage to determine our future. But He had each one of us in mind when He determined before creation to send His Son, Christ Jesus to that cross and raise Him from that tomb to rescue from the bondage of sin. I do not know why I received faith in Jesus and not others. God doesn’t tell us that. What He does is show us how complete our salvation is in Jesus, that even our ability to follow Jesus is His work. Our salvation depends 100% on God. If even 1% depended on Mark Heilman, it would be hopeless for me.

Paul’s words are not spoken in a course on Christian teaching, but as a hymn of praise. If we look at the language of Ephesians 1 it is just one long, incomplete sentence. It is a burst of joy from a man who had been bound in sin and was freed from that by Christ Jesus. When Paul writes formally about Christian teaching in Romans he only speaks of predestination after fully showing that we are dead in sin and freed by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Predestination is not where we begin with the Gospel—we start with the cross of Jesus. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which He lavished upon us.” Predestination is only for the Christian, those who have faith, to give us the full assurance of how complete our salvation is because it rests solely in Christ. If we use it to explain why some are saved and not others, then we are trying to control the situation. That is why Luther was so strident in condemning what Erasmus said about free will. All we do is live in the freedom God has won for us in Christ Jesus.

“Rush” chose free will. Unlike many rock groups who breakup the three members of “Rush” remained friends. Neal Peart, the group’s drummer, who wrote the words to the song, died last year. His death has so grieved guitarist Alex Lifeson that he has not picked up a guitar since then. No amount of “free will” can save us from death. On our own we are bound to it.

But in Jesus there is true freedom. It happens not because of struggle to assert ourselves and put our first foot forward, but by the grace and love of God. God chose each one of us, called us by name through Baptism, and assures us that it is certain because He had each one of us in mind in Christ Jesus before creation. We can’t and do not have to figure out how that can be, just rejoice that God as done that for us, as Paul did when he said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

Responsive reading on the joy we have in God’s election

P: Lord God, You can control anything and everything. Your will be done:

C: “The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.” (Proverbs 16:4)

P: Your will is the salvation of people, not by what we do which only leads to sin, but by Your grace alone as we see in the example of Esau and Jacob:

C: “Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’” (Romans 9:10-12)

P: Above all You are the One who planned our salvation in the ministry of Your Son, Jesus Christ. What happened to Him was not by chance.

C: “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” (Acts 4:27-8)

P: In Jesus we see that it is not that we chose to follow You, but You have called us.

C: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in My name the Father will give you.” (John 15:16)

P: Before time You had each one of in mind; You love us so that You planned from eternity to save in in Jesus.

C: “To God’s elect, exiles scattered, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood.” (1 Peter 1:1-2)

P: You have made Your intent clearly known in Jesus. We are now Your means of showing that to the world.

C: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:10-11)

P: Help us to see that Your election is not about some lottery to choose if we receive Your love, but the confidence to know how thoroughly all of our salvation depends on Your grace on account of Christ Jesus.

C: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30)

P: Hold us in Your love so that we can be certain that we will hear these words:

C: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’ (Matthew 25:34)

Prayers:

The Lord’s Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

P: Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with Your most gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help, that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in You we may glorify Your holy name and finally, by Your mercy, obtain eternal salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (pastor) C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “O Christ, Our Hope, Our Hearts’ Desire” – Hymn #553

Postlude