God has chosen you. A sermon preached on June 18, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: DEUTERONOMY 7:6-8
I PETER 2:9-10
JOHN 15:15-17

Let's call her Sarah, but there are many people who could fit her description.
She was strikingly beautiful and not in that plastic Hollywood way
She was intelligent.
She was well dressed and spoke well
But her facial expression and body language often conveyed the sense that she was like a frightened bird.
She talked about her loneliness and of her hunger to find love
She desperately longed for someone who would give her love.
As I listened to her story,
I thought, "Surely a woman as good looking,
As pleasant to talk with and be around must have plenty of dates and many opportunities to 'fall in love'.
How was it that Sarah possessed so many outwardly beautiful and attractive attributes,
But lacked self-confidence?

How was it that she was so afraid to enter into any sort of long term and positive relationship?
The answer came as I listened about old memories of rejection
There was no abuse involved
But when she was 9 she grew 5 inches.
During her junior high years she was always by far the tallest girl in the class
At 5'10 she stopped growing
But her height in junior high and high school seemed worked against her.
She was not particularly athletic.
Her lack of eye/hand co-ordination in basketball, volleyball and track further ostracized her.
She was always the last picked for teams.
Now as a woman, her height compliments her good looks
Yet she cannot believe that,
Nor can she remove from her mind the memories of school dances or team sports when all her friends were chosen before her.
She recalls the hurtful names her classmates called her,
As she sees their sneering faces in her mind.
Maybe you do not know what it is like, "she said, 'to be in a group and be the only one that is not chosen or the last to be chosen under duress!
It makes you feel like a piece of junk!

"It does indeed, does it not? Was my quiet response!

Lots of studies of behavioral patterns and the healing of memories clearly indicate that the way we see ourselves determines to a large degree,
The way we act and react in life.

Our self-perception, sense ofself-worth, and self-esteem tend to be an important governing factor in our lives.

For example,
If we are told by family, friends and peers that we are a loser or stupid,
We tend to absorb this—see ourselves as a loser and end up to large degree acting like a loser.

If we see ourselves as a victim—we tend to let people victimize us—there is no other option we think.
If we are told we are uncreative—we tend to back off from opportunities that invite us to express or to exercise our creativity

Like Sarah, we set ourselves up!
We let our beliefs about ourselves determine our behavior.

As Sarah's story indicates,
Self-perception, often originates in childhood.
And for some it never alters or changes.
Even though sadly some of the beliefs from childhood about us are false

A lot of people have a very negative view of themselves as people—Eeyore people—owing to mis-information,
Wrong assumptions they have absorbed from misinformed and unauthorized sources in their lives.

Peter gives to believers then and now *important reminders of who they (we) are in God's eyes*. It is a perspective that so often we forget because the world's voices around us are so persuasive and beguiling.

First, Peter tells his readers—then and now—*you are a chosen race.*
In The Message, Eugene Peterson paraphrases it thusly, **you are the ones chosen by God…from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.**
This truth of being chosen by God runs through the whole of scripture.
The reading from Deuteronomy reminds us that God's choice of Israel as his chosen was not an arbitrary one,
Nor one based upon the moral superiority of Israel.
Further,
It was not by their efforts or actions that they were chosen,
Nor because they were the largest group.
NO—God's choice of Israel as chosen was God's exclusive and deliberate choice

God chose Israel because of his affection
Israel owned nothing—except the resources which God had given them!

I cannot highlight enough how revolutionary and perspective changing is living in the truth of Jesus' declaration **You did not choose me, but I chose you.**
Our response to God is not the first thing that sets our faith in motion—it is God's action,
Love, affection, favour to us first!

We are chosen by God not owing to what we have,
What we have done
What we look like
The colour of our skin
What we possess,
Who are the members of our family,
Our worldly power, our worldly successes
Even what we do in terms of vocation.
NO we are God's chosen BECAUSE of his affection,
His mercy,
His grace

It's all about the truth and unmerited love of God for us in Jesus Christ!

Even with our disabilities,
Character flaws,
Shortcomings,
Insecurities and immaturity
God accepts us as we are!

No preconditions!
No restrictions
We do not have to get cleaned up or stitched up or made up to be acceptable by God
He accepts us as we are and works to make us the people He wants us to be!
Question: How much do you think you are worth?
I am not talking about net worth, rather—<u>self worth</u>
The world often confuses the two
But here in this morning's readings from Deuteronomy, and John we are reminded that we are of great value, preciousness, specialness to God—each of us—for we are CHOSEN BY HIM

You are a *royal priesthood.*
Peter's first readers were certainly more familiar with Jewish beliefs and givens than we are
So this phrase "royal priesthood" would have stood out for them in a way it probably does not for us reading and hearing it today.
However, the description still stands.
By and through God's action in Jesus,
Priests no longer come from a specific tribal line as they do in the Old Testament.
Nor is <u>direct</u> access to God limited to only a select few—again, as it was in the Old Testament.
Now, says Peter, owing to God's work in Chits, we can go directly to God,

No intermediary is necessary.
To add to this Peter says—*you are a holy nation. God's own people..*
It is one of those many themes that run through Peter's letter--holiness
God has chosen us to be member of his royal priesthood
--not just so we can look good,
Assert spiritual superiority,
Be smug about supposedly hidden spiritual knowledge,
Be all judgey wudgey about others
No, God through Jesus has chosen you
In order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

PROCLAIM—tell, announce, declare, reveal, spread abroad, give out, make known, blazon.
By our lifestyle,
Our speech,
Our thoughts,
Our actions in ways that make Jesus winsome and attractive.
In ways that lift him up that in time, all may be drawn to him.
Always, always, always our position as God's people must be that of John the Baptist,
He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.

As Paul Oakley's praise chorus phrases it,

It's all about you, Jesus
And all this is for you
For your glory and your fame
It's not about me.

Remember, you are able to do this in the first place and you can only continue to do this in and by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Peter is not finished.
He also reminds his readers then and now
You are forgiven.
There are no 3 words that communicate self-worth better than **you are forgiven.**

God does not rehearse your sins, like we so often do to others and to ourselves—God releases them!

|For God is in the business of forgiving sin
He can take all our sins,
All the wedges that we drive in our relationships with God, others and within ourselves and as we ask or seek his forgiveness, he wipes our slate clean!

That's what in part God's mercy is all about
Confession to God brings forgiveness by God—immediate and without charge

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:10)

Does all this sound too wonderful?

Too good to be true
I wonder if Peter's first readers asked such a question.
I wonder if too many Sarahs or Sams among us still hold to the definitions of self-worth and value given by the world around us
Rather than the definition of self-worth given by the promises and assurances of God in Christ.
I wonder if many continue to be reluctant and hesitant about Jesus' action for us
And what it means for all time and all people
BECAUSE it sounds too simple, too straight-forward.
I wonder how many continue to stay at a distance from Jesus because they think here is some sort of catch,
Hook, hidden agenda or fine print when it comes to God's love and mercy for each of us –first
I wonder…
Look, there is no hidden agenda or sleight of hand or fine print—that's the world's way, not God's way
God's way is echoed in the three lessons this morning
God decides and chooses us when He will.

The call and the challenge—to which we will respond for the rest of our earthly lives is—how then shall we live?

Rejoicing in our chosenenss by God
Or listening too much to the beguiling and often belittling voices of this world…
AMEN