

SCRIPTURE TEXT: John 15:12-17

SERMON TITLE: Loved, Chosen and Appointed

Well, we've been working on this confirmation since February. We've met 11 times and had a weekend retreat together. You've been a great confirmation class. And even though we've talked about a lot of stuff, this is my last chance to pull it all together. I want you know three things this morning: You are loved. You've been chosen. And you've been appointed to bear fruit.

You are loved. In July of 1861 during the American Civil War, a soldier from Rhode Island named Sullivan Ballew wrote a beautiful letter to his wife, Sarah. He wrote the letter because his company was close to going into battle and he had a nagging feeling that he wouldn't make it—that he would die in battle.

Well, his letter to Sarah was a love letter. He wrote about the wonderful memories he had of their lives together and of his hopes for the future, especially his longing to see their sons grow up. He poured out his heart in that letter: *Sarah, my love for you is deathless...If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.* Seven days later, Sullivan Ballew was killed at the First Battle of Bull Run.¹

Well, the love that Sullivan Ballew had for his wife Sarah reminds me of how much Jesus Christ loves us—and each of you. On the night before his death, love was on Jesus' mind. He said to his disciples: *As the Father has loved me, so I love you....This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

¹ Dr. Carl Schenck, "Loving and Being Loved," Sermon Mall, <http://www.sermonmall.com/TheMall/00/may00/052800v.html> (accessed May 24, 2000).

Well, Jesus did lay down his life for us—for you and for me. And when I close my eyes and set my mind free to imagine how much God loves me in Jesus Christ, I can hear Jesus upon the cross breathing his last breath and whispering my name. Can you hear him whisper your name? There is no greater love than this. You are loved.

And we've been chosen. Have you ever wanted to be someone's friend, and he or she just ignored you and treated you as if you didn't exist? I've had that experience and it's painful, isn't it? Rejection always is painful. I can remember when I was a freshman in high school, I was really interested in a girl named Sally. I wanted her to be my girl friend, but she wasn't interested in me. She was interested in someone else—a guy named Tommy. No matter what I did to gain her friendship, it didn't work, except for one time. Somehow or another, I managed to find enough courage to ask Sally for a date to a party that the high school Latin Club was sponsoring. And to my utter amazement she said yes, but then she spent the whole time on our date talking about Tommy. I was crushed. She had chosen someone else. As far as I was concerned, I was a reject—and it hurt.

So for me, when I hear that Jesus said to his disciples, ***You did not choose me but I choose you***, I almost can't believe my ears. Jesus has chosen me—and Jesus has chosen you—we are not rejects in his eyes. Now we're certainly not perfect—we probably feel inadequate—but that doesn't matter—he loves us, he's chosen us, and we are his friends.

And how do we show that we are his friends? We do what he commands us to do and that is, to love one another as he has loved us.

Jesus Christ has appointed us for this purpose: to love one another. Do you ever wonder what your purpose is in life? Well, it's not too hard to figure out. According to Jesus, our

purpose in life is to love one another. This is what it means to bear fruit: love one another. Love one another in little ways and big ways.

Even think about what it means to love like this: There was once a man named Joseph Merrick. He lived from 1862 to 1890. He was known as The Elephant Man because of the profound deformities that misshaped much of his body including his head and his face. Most people treated him as a freak. They used him and abused him. Many people were frightened of him simply because of his the way he looked.

In a movie made about his life, there is a scene in which a mob is chasing Merrick through a train station. They finally corner him in a public toilet. Some simply gawk at him; others laugh at him; some yell insults at him. All the while, Merrick is crying out: “I am not an animal! I am not an animal! I am a human being! I am a man!”

In time, a doctor named Frederick Treves meets Merrick and begins to treat him as a human being—and Merrick begins to live again.

And then one day, Merrick receives a visit from a beautiful and acclaimed actress named Mrs. Kendall. She uses exceptional gentleness and sensitivity with him. She exchanges some lines with him from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. When they’re done, Mrs. Kendall says to Merrick: *Oh, Mr. Merrick, you’re not an elephant man at all.*

Oh no? Merrick replies.

She whispers to him, *You’re Romeo!* And then she gently kisses him of the cheek of his grossly deformed face.²

² Jim McGuiggan, “Elephant Men,” HEARTLIGHT Magazine, http://www.heartlight.org/cgi/simplify.cgi?20020620_elephantmen.html (accessed May 16, 2009).

Can we love like this? Why not? All of us are loved like this. You are loved like this. God loves us like this in Jesus Christ. We've been chosen as friends and we're appointed to love like this. I pray that it may so for you and for us today and always. Amen.