

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
August 9, 2020  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Romans 8:28-30** 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. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (NIV 1984)

### Chosen

Uncertainty. One of the most common words thrown around lately has been uncertainty. What caused thousands of young people in a relatively stable and peaceful city like London to riot and loot and rebel? Lots of theories. No real answers. Markets respond to recent political tug of war, almost as if they are scolding elected officials for their failure to offer some predictability, some clear vision and plan for the future. Good or bad, right or wrong, just let us know what's going to happen, how things will look in the future. Have you noticed how even the experts have stopped offering clear and logical explanations of financial events much less try to give guarantees with dates and numbers for when things will happen in the future.

Most disturbing, recently I heard one commentator explain the economy is like a choose your own adventure book. If option 'A' is the reason behind this action, then this is what might happen in the future. If explanation 'B' turns out to be true, then jobs and housing prices will turn out quite differently.

Maybe you never read choose your own adventure books when you were in school. You get to a certain point in the plot and you have to choose between a couple of different options. If you want the heroes of the story to go down into the abandoned mineshaft, turn to page thirty-nine. If they should turn around and swim across the lake, turn to page eighty-five. Choose correctly and your story will have a happy ending. Choose poorly and your story may end quickly, abruptly, tragically. I don't know about you, but choosing my own adventure might make for interesting reading, but it doesn't give me a lot of confidence for my life. Do you know what it leaves me with? More uncertainty.

### I. Poor Choices

We need more certainty for our spiritual lives than economic experts and political commentators can offer us. So let's turn to what information God wants to share with you today: **"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."** (Romans 8:28) For every person who loves God, every event and action in life works for God's definition of good.

But are you one of those people who love God? How do you know if you have been **“called according to his purpose?”** (Romans 8:28) Just consider what you would do with an opportunity like the one afforded King Solomon. God told him: **“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”** (1 Kings 3:5) What would you ask for? Would you ask for a guarantee on your investments? You invest today so that someday you will be able to enjoy a comfortable retirement. Would you ask for good grades and a good academic career? You study and do homework now so that you can get good grades and attend good schools and hopefully some day get a good job. Would you ask for health and happiness for your family? You buy healthy food and feed your family nutritious meals so they don’t get sick or turn out weak and flabby. But what would happen if God gave you everything you want? Would that be enough to take away life’s greatest uncertainties?

You have a plan. You take action today. And if everything goes according to plan next week, next month, next year, you will be able to enjoy the benefits of your plan. But you don’t know for sure how things will turn out. And because you don’t know how things will end up, you don’t even know if you are making the right plans today. And you and I don’t have the luxury of treating life like a choose your own adventure book. You can’t just arrive at an ending you don’t prefer and start the story all over again. And even if God could give you whatever you ask, would financial stability, job security or family health and safety really be enough? Life is not a video game with a reset button for fixing mistakes.

## II. Better Choices

Good education always starts with what the students know and then adds more, uses the information they already have in their brains and builds on that. If you are in doubt about whether your life shows that you really love God and if you are **“called according to his purpose,”** you will want to see what other information God reveals. The Bible explains: **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** (Romans 8:29) But that concept of predestination scares too many people with more questions than answers. So let’s skip ahead a little to figure that one out: **“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”** (Romans 8:30) Spoiler alert: it all ends in glory. If you want to know how your life turns out, just look at God’s choices.

Working backwards in a choose your own adventure story would feel a little bit like cheating. Not to mention, it would be a real challenge to page through the entire book to find the ending you want and then page from one plot twist backwards. But that’s exactly what God want you to do for your spiritual life. Your life ends in glory. How do you get there after making some dubious if not dreadful choices, if your priorities in life leave you with more doubt and confusion, if getting what you want out of life might leave your spiritual welfare in complete uncertainty?

You have glory because you have been justified. Jesus knows your poor choices, your bad choices, your dreadful choices. Jesus understands that you have enough trouble trying to make correct decisions at the grocery store—generic peanut butter or organic, reduced salt or extra chunky—He certainly understands your woeful track record with making all the

right spiritual choices. But that's precisely why Jesus came. He made all the right choices in life and stood before Herod and Pontius Pilate without a shred of uncertainty about His own innocence. And at the cross Jesus chose to stand in the place for every disobedient or ignorant or uninformed soul who ever lived.

And since Jesus chose to take your guilt and punishment on the cross, now you are called. The gospel message goes out into all the world offering the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection to all. The Holy Spirit works saving faith in the hearts of believers through this gospel message. Young and old lives are regenerated by the Word of God connected to the water of Baptism. Deflated and defeated souls are brought to life through the good news of Jesus. And because you have been called to faith now you know for sure that you have also been predestined. In other words: ***“God elected believers in order that they might believe, not because they have believed.”***<sup>1</sup> God knows the plan. God carries out the plan. God chose you. God just has a more perfect and enlightened perspective on human history than you and I do.

### III. Certain Choices

If you had read one choose your own adventure and learned how to get to a happy ending, you would probably use some of the same clues to get the same result the next time you pick up another book. Wouldn't it make sense to learn the same lesson for your spiritual life? God chose you. You have glory through the perfect life and redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Good education means making choices that are focused on Jesus. You are called to faith through the gospel. Good education means choosing to return to God's Word for encouragement and support, for guidance and direction, for correction and instruction. This is where you find your treasure that not only created your faith, but continues to strengthen and keep you in the faith.

But God doesn't tell us all the answers we want for life. He doesn't lead you from one page of life and secretly whisper correct decisions into your ear. Remember, good education doesn't just teach facts, it creates good critical thinking skills. God says those who believe in Him are called according to His purpose, they are the ones who love Him. For you and me God promises all things work **“for the good.”** (Romans 8:28) You can ask why some people believe in Jesus, but some people reject Him. But God doesn't answer that question. You can ask why some people have easy and comfortable lives while other people's problems rival the tragedies of Job. God doesn't tell you why. He just reassures you that there is no such thing as an accident in history. Even the accidents are God's ways of working things for good. And notice that **“all things”** can include pain as well as joy, suffering as well as triumph. (Romans 8:28) God doesn't say everything will just work itself out or everything will always get better. He does say that even poverty or famine, jobless or eviction, sickness or death will bring God's good for your eternal and spiritual welfare.

All of it has a purpose. That much is certain. Here is God's goal for your life: **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that**

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine. “Predestination of the Saints, 17.34.” Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol VI. Gerald Bray, ed. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois; 1998, p. 228.

**he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”** (Romans 8:29) God didn't choose the people who would turn out to be good or the people who would eventually believe. Out of His gracious heart God chose you to be His own. God penciled you into the blueprints of His plan for salvation so you could share with Jesus Christ in His glory. What Jesus has as true God, what He retained by His victorious resurrection from the grave is yours by grace. In an uncertain world believers know we will share resurrection glory in heaven. And as we trudge through life we have certainty. Because God has chosen us we know that heavenly glory is already ours.

Amen.