

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
on Sunday October 19th 2008 by the Reverend Alan Neale
“To choose is so divine”**

I Thessalonians chapter one, verse four: “We know, brothers and sisters, beloved by God that he has chosen you”.

Though at times God’s act of choosing (sometimes called his election) is fraught theologically and complicated philosophically, yet surely it is meant to be always comforting and encouraging that God has chosen to love and to die for his creation, for we are all, in St. Paul’s words, beloved by God!

We celebrate, we delight in the divine ability to make choices and surely we recognize that when one person is inhibited from making choices... by sickness, by prejudice, by addiction, by fear... then that person is less than human, truly less than divine.

A fascinating academic study, entitled Making Choices Impairs Subsequent Self-Control: A Limited-Resource Account of Decision Making, Self-Regulation, and Active Initiative, begins with these words: *“The rich complexity of human social life is partly attributable to choice. Each day millions of people make multiple decisions. These range from momentous and far-reaching decisions, such as what career to pursue and whether to order the troops into battle, to relatively fleeting and inconsequential choices, such as whether to take another cup of tea or to floss that night. Moreover, choices have proliferated, increasing the number of decisions people can (and must) make. The coffee shop chain Starbucks boasted in 2003 that it offered each customer 19,000 beverage possibilities at every store.”*

To be able to make a choice is what defines us a human, to be able to make a choice challenges us as people but it is so divine.

What is fearful for so many in this contemporary financial crisis (global, and doubtless long-term, in nature) is that they are being deprived of the ability to make free choices... options are being reduced, scaled down and with this comes a sense of powerlessness which is so devastating and debilitating.

And in the midst of this, the Church (with all other churches) begins a program asking for financial support for the ministry of God in this place and beyond. Hopefully you have already received this postcard... “Invest in God’s Economy. Make a material investment, expect a spiritual return”.

You and I are being asked to make choices for God... choices which will enable the maintenance and the extension of programs to speak of God’s love and to express God’s love within this community and far beyond.

God has shown us that he will not be constricted, he will not be confined, he will not be limited in the way he makes choices.

To the people of Israel led by Moses... though they whined and complained, though they were not particularly strong and powerful, God decided to make this choice, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest”.

To Moses God decided to make this choice, he would not be confined nor restricted by theological expectation, “I will show you my glory”.

And to the church at Thessalonica, though it was a ragbag of disparate individuals, God chose them (independently, freely)... God chose them to be beloved by Him.

Later in today’s service you will hear of one parishioner who has made, and will make, choices for God and for his kingdom.

In the weeks to come we will think more about this divine ability, vocation, to choose... as our academic study concludes, “Self-control and decision-making are central, vital skills for functioning in human culture” – making choices for God, though not easy, are central, vital skills for functioning in the divine economy.

The Pharisees and their brood try to trap Jesus, to remove his options, to force an unhealthy decision... Jesus with great adroitness, skill and charm discovers the power to choose and gives to us, today, this same choice... “Jesus said, Why are you trying to trap me? Why are you playing games with me? Give to Caesar what is his, and give God what is his”.

But... basic, fundamental, underlying is this choice above all... “that we have turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God”... this, friends, is the choice... and this we are called to renew daily... in the Name of Christ and in the Power of the Spirit.
AMEN.