

Text: Isaiah 42:1-7. Baptism of Our Lord. **January 11, 2015.** You are the LORD's chosen ones, chosen in Christ. Amen.

In the first *Toy Story* movie, there's a funny scene in the Pizza Planet. There's one of those games with the big claw. And there's all these green, three-eyed stuffed toys waiting to be grabbed. Woody refers to them as zealots because they treat the claw like God. They look up to the claw. They almost worship the claw. They are in awe at the claw. And they wait for the claw to decide who will be chosen. They want to be chosen. They long to be chosen. When a kid comes and plays the game and picks up one of them, they say in this eerie, cult-like voice, "He has been chosen." Chosen. Ever want to be chosen? Would it be good news to hear you were chosen for something better than back yard football? You were chosen by the almighty LORD in baptism. You are chosen. Chosen. Look at what the LORD did in choosing. Look at what Christ did as the LORD's chosen one. Look at what you are to do as Christ's chosen ones.

Look at what the LORD did. And let's back way up, because Isaiah does. The LORD created the heavens, and the word created implies out of nothing. The LORD stretched out the heavens like you stretch out peanut brittle or silly putty. The LORD gives breath and life. Maybe we better listen to what this LORD has to say. Maybe, just maybe, we want to pay attention to his choice.

The LORD chose Christ. Did you catch that word in verse one? My chosen one. Chosen is really a key word on this Sunday of the baptism of our LORD. The LORD chose Christ, this is what Christ really means, the anointed or the chosen one. The LORD chose Christ as the one to carry out his plan. The LORD chose Christ to be our Substitute. The LORD chose Christ to take our place. Instead of counting our sins to us, the LORD counted them to Christ. Instead of demanding perfection from us, the LORD demanded perfection from Christ. And he got it. The LORD chose Christ, because Christ is the only one who could carry out God's plan. Christ was the only one perfect, so he was the only one in whom the LORD could truly delight.

That's what else the LORD did. He delighted in Christ. Christ made the LORD happy with his perfect life. The LORD chose to let that perfect life count for you, you yourself, as though you had lived it. The LORD upheld Christ. The LORD supported Christ. The LORD took hold of Christ. The LORD was on his side. How could Christ fail in his mission with the LORD on his side? He couldn't fail. He was the chosen one, the upheld one, the delighted in one. That's what the LORD did. The LORD chose Christ. The LORD upheld Christ. The LORD delighted in Christ.

So look at what Christ did as the chosen one. Well, first let's do like Isaiah and look at what Christ didn't do. He didn't shout or cry out. He didn't draw undue attention to himself. He didn't raise his voice in the streets. He wasn't the football player always trash talking and banging his chest. He didn't do a choreographed celebration when he scored a touchdown. He was born in a cave for crying out loud. He lived as a homeless person. He died without the shirt on his back. Someone took even that from him.

Here's what's more important about what Christ didn't do as the chosen one. He didn't break a bruised reed. Now what does this mean? It means he didn't crush those already bruised with their sins. He didn't pile guilt on those who already had enough guilt. A tax collector named Zaccheus, who was a cheat, but was sorry and felt bad and didn't want to do it again, Jesus approached him. Jesus forgave him. Jesus promised Zaccheus rescue from his sins and their guilt and Zaccheus responded by paying back those he cheated, four times the amount he cheated them, and giving half of his possessions to the poor. Christ didn't snuff out smoldering wicks. What's that? A smoldering wick refers to someone weak in faith. Jesus didn't pounce on those weak in faith, men like Nicodemus, a religious ruler who came to Jesus at night. Nicodemus came at night because he was afraid of his religious friends, but he had faith in Jesus and wanted to learn more. Nicodemus asked some silly questions, but Jesus patiently answered them. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to trust in him as the Savior. Jesus even spoke to Nicodemus, the man weak in faith, the most famous verse in all the Bible, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus fanned the tiniest spark of faith into fire. He didn't snuff out the weak in faith. He encouraged and built up that faith.

Another thing the Christ didn't do. He didn't give up. He did not falter. He was not discouraged. He didn't get tired of teaching the Nicodemuses of the world who were slow to understand. He didn't give up instructing his disciples, no matter how many times they fought about who was the greatest. Jesus didn't give up. The Christ didn't get tired and say, "I really don't want to do this whole dying on the cross thing. Somebody else can do it. You people can find your own way to heaven. It's going to be too painful for me." NO! The Christ never gave up. He went all the way through the spitting on, the beating, the whipping, the thorns, the nails, the blood, the pain, the thirst, the suffocation, the dying. He went all the way through until he could say, "It is finished!" And the LORD said, "It is finished indeed!" when three days later he raised him from the dead.

Wow! I guess we spent so much time talking about what the Christ didn't do, we haven't gotten yet to what he did do. He brought justice to the nations. He brought forth justice. He established justice on the earth. Hear the common word? Justice. Now justice can be a frightening word. The mother whose child was killed by a drunk driver demands justice! The man is sentenced to life in prison. Justice! But when we face the LORD, we don't fear that aspect of justice. Make no mistake. The LORD is fair. He treats all people the same. He doesn't play favorites. That's a major message of this Epiphany season. We keep hearing the world, the earth, the islands, the peoples. But how can Christ be just, fair and send some to hell and others to heaven? Those on the highway to hell refuse his forgiveness. They refuse the key to heaven that Christ gives. They refuse the gift of faith that Christ freely distributes through his Word and baptism. Those who go to heaven? I can't claim something I did. I simply cling to the cross. I look to Jesus. I put all my chips on Christ because he's the Savior. With Christ's blood covering my sins, it's totally fair that the LORD lets me into heaven. With the perfect life of my personal substitute on my personal account with the LORD, I look forward to justice. All believers in Jesus are on the highway to heaven. What does Christ do as the LORD's chosen one? He gives justice.

Here's what else the Christ does as the LORD's chosen one. He brings hope, to the islands. The islands are faraway places, people you wouldn't expect. Who would have expected that two millennia and half a world away, we would be trusting in Christ? How unlikely that just steps from a town famous for freedom from religion, we have a group of people clinging to Christ and standing out and belonging to a Bible-believing group of organized religion? Kind of hard to believe. Unless you've experienced Christ. Unless you've experienced his hope. Maybe it was listening to the dying confession of your grandmother, "I'm not afraid to die. I'm going to be with Jesus." Maybe it was watching your friend at school, who now sits two pews over and just noticing, "There's something different about her." Maybe it was the first time you came here, never intending to come back, but the joy, the hope, the friendliness of these changed people touched something deep inside you. And gave you hope. Where did that hope come from? Christ! Why is hope in such short supply? There's so little Christ in our world and even in the lives we show to the islands.

And doesn't that really lead us to what we do, as Christ's chosen ones? Or maybe what we should do? I heard someone say the other day, "Should is a dangerous word. It reminds us of all the things we should be doing, but we don't." I should be patient when driving in the snow. Especially with my children in the back seat listening and watching. But I'm late! And I hate the snow! And these people won't go faster! What's the matter with them! And then when it's summer, "They are crazy. They're going so fast! What's the matter with them!" As though I and I alone drive the perfect speed at all times. Because I and I alone am the perfect person. What stupidity. What arrogance! And that is what we naturally are! Do you want me to list 75 more examples from my life, of my sin? Do you want me to give 75 from yours, examples of sin? Sin is what we naturally are! So sin is what we naturally do!

Praise the LORD that someone took our place, someone was our Substitute. Christ saw we couldn't be perfect. So he was perfect. And the LORD delighted in him. And so the LORD delights in you, not because of you, but because of your Substitute! Your Substitute took your place. Your Substitute lived the perfect life. Your Substitute took your sins. Your Substitute had your failures credited to his account so his perfection could be credited to yours. Stop and think about that. Your Substitute had your failures credited to his account, so his perfection could be credited to yours. Try that at the bank! That's what the Christ, the chosen one, did.

And better yet, he personally applied this perfection to you, just to you, just one little person. You probably were a very little person when this perfection was first credited to you. Maybe you were too little to remember the day. But did your parents give you a plaque, a cross stitch, a certificate, a medallion to remind you? You are perfect! Have you figured out what I'm talking about? Baptism!! Yes! Baptism!! You are perfect. Baptism declares it.

He baptized you to give you the chance to do a tiny sliver of what he has done. Make no mistake. You can't save anyone from their sins. You can't give perfection to anyone. You can't die on a cross for the islands' sins. But you can open eyes that are blind, free captives from prison, be a light for the Gentiles. Imagine if you go to work tomorrow, smiling on a dark and dreary Monday. Think somebody might ask, "Why are you so happy?" Think there's a chance to be a light, a witness to a Gentile? Suppose a friend confides in you, "I got drunk and slept with this girl this weekend. I feel horrible." Think you can free that captive from the prison of guilt with the good news, "Look at what the Christ has done! He freed you. He died for you." When you see your kids fighting for the 236,785th time. Will you lose your temper and give up? Did Christ, the chosen one, give up in rescuing us from our sin? Will we, as Christ's chosen ones, give up on pointing to Jesus to rescue others from their sins? Maybe a reminder of baptism will do the trick. Maybe a calm parent can calm things down. You are chosen to be God's child. That's better than those zealots in *Toy Story*. You are chosen. Look at what we get to do. Open eyes. Free captives. Be a light to the Gentiles. Amen.