

In the middle of the Council Estate I grew up on was a large square of grass. It was known, somewhat unimaginatively as “the Green”. There was no play equipment on it, not even the odd goalpost, it was simply grass. I suspect that the Council thought that any facilities would be vandalised.

The “Green” was not lit by streetlights so at night it was wise not to cross it on your own. But in daylight it was the location where lads (sorry, it really was only boys) played football. A gang would gather when someone’s parents could afford a ball, and two goals were created out of jumpers on the floor. Then a ritual bit of humiliation took place. The two best footballers lined the rest of us up and took it in turn to pick the best players for their teams. Now given that my ball control was that of an injured rhinoceros I was always one of the very last to get picked. I would have loved to have been one of the chosen ones, but it never happened.

In life being chosen, other than being last to be picked, gives us a feeling of ownership, perhaps even one of honour. Knowing that you are valued is a key human need, and that’s as true for adults as children.

However, in a competitive world, it’s easy to feel underrated and unvalued. There’s always someone brighter at school, faster on the sports field, more dynamic at work, or simply more physically attractive.

Yet the amazing thing is that so many people do not realise that they ARE chosen. Yes, chosen by the greatest judge ever, the creator of all there is and has ever been!

Jesus tells his followers (John 15:9-17), in discussions he shares with them immediately prior to his savage death, that they did not choose him, he chose them.

The disciples may have reasonably thought it had been them who had decided to follow this incredible teacher for the best part of three years. But, oh no! Jesus chose them.

And the stunning truth is that Jesus also has chosen YOU. Why?

Most of us have realised that we are probably not going to reach the dizzy heights of fame and fortune. So, why has Christ chosen us?

What did we do to get picked to play for God?

The joy is we didn’t!

The choice of us has nothing to do with our talents or lack of them. We are chosen because we are loved!

The Gospels rightly say a great deal about love. Loving your enemies is a striking feature of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus endorses the golden rule of treating others as you would have them treat you. But this passage in John’s Gospel is making two particular points about love.

In order to fully grasp these two points, we need to say something about the word “love”. The problem is that the word is ambiguous for it translates several different New Testament Greek words. So, we need to borrow the word that Jesus is using in our John passage. It’s the word “agape”.

Agape is the quality that God has, it's about the good of others, rather than the good of your own self. It's the love that God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share with each other. It's the love that means you'll give your life for someone else, just as Jesus gave his life for us.

When you are a Christian, you develop a good relationship with God. You take on God's characteristics as your own and you learn to love one another as God loves you.

And this is the first aspect of our love, our agape. It's a Christian community thing.

Jesus calls on the disciples to render to one another the kind of love that he has shown for them. Our love for fellow Christians is to be modelled on Jesus's love for us.

For the church family to effectively work in the world all its members need to experience the support and love- to-the-death of one another. We are to be a community of love.

This is a high bar, but we are empowered by the very love from Jesus to achieve this in our lives.

This empowerment drives the second feature of love/agape in John's Gospel. Love is action, in fact it is radical action.

The word "agape" is translated into Latin as "caritas", hence the English word "charity". Our love, our agape is to bear fruit. We don't just believe and worship, we act out that love. In the dark days of the Pandemic, it was so often Churches, large and small, who have run charitable projects. And this week we rally around "Christian Aid" to show our love in radical giving.

So, Brothers and Sisters, lift up your hearts for you have been chosen by Christ. You are chosen to be loved. You have been chosen to be empowered by that love.

To misquote the Beatles – All you need is Agape!

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