

Clackamas United Church of Christ
Rev. Adam Ericksen
8.25.19

The Chosen One Chooses Love Over Fear

Throughout human history, many people have looked up to the heavens and proclaimed, "I am the Chosen One."

For example, the Pharaohs, Emperors, Caesars, Kings, and at least one President all have claimed to be the "Chosen One."

They love to claim that there are major problems in the world and that they are the only ones who can solve them and make things great again.

Unfortunately, most people who have this mentality and rise to political prominence are not only delusional but also very dangerous.

If you look back through history, you will find that 99 percent of these "Chosen Ones" rule their people with the exact same method.

They attempt to unite their people against a common enemy.

They prop up a minority group as an extremely dangerous "other" that the people need to defeat.

It's the ancient politics of fear. The politics of violence. The politics of scapegoating.

And it is extremely dangerous. Because someone who thinks he is the Chosen One will use the politics of scapegoating to target just about any group. He will target brown people or black people or rich people or poor people or migrants or journalists or Muslims or Jews or whomever, just as long as he can keep the target off himself and on someone else. In participating in the politics of scapegoating the leader channels all the frustrations of his people against a common enemy.

We saw this in Nazi Germany. Hitler thought he was the Chosen One and sadly, many Christians followed Hitler, first in claiming that Jews were disloyal and second in trying to exterminate them. One early Christian sympathizer of Hitler was a pastor named [Martin Niemoller](#).

Niemoller thought Hitler and his Nazi party would revive the German nation with German pride. Niemoller fell for Hitler's rise to power, but eventually he had the foresight to see the evil within Hitler's scapegoating of the Jewish people. He then worked to oppose Hitler's policies.

Niemoller was captured and imprisoned for his defiance against Hitler. He survived his imprisonment and lived the rest of his life racked with guilt for having not stood up for the Jews and against Hitler before it was too late.

Niemoller dealt with his guilt in his later writings. He made a confession about his life that has become a famous poem. [Niemoller wrote](#):

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out,
Because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out,
Because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out,
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

I tell you about Martin Niemoller because I don't want to be like Martin Niemoller. And because this is where we are at in the United States. The politics of the current self-professed "Chosen One" is the politics of scapegoating that channels hatred against certain minority groups. In a move that is eerily similar to the 1940s, the self-professed Chosen One pointed his finger at American Jews who disagree with his policies. He accused them of being disloyal.

This hits home. I have Jewish friends. Many of you have Jewish friends. In fact, last year we had a rabbi come talk with us about Judaism and growing antisemitism. She disagrees with the president's policies concerning Israel. She is a friend. And I want to rise up with her and all of our Jewish siblings in this moment.

And many are left wondering, how did we get to this point that looks so much like Nazi Germany?

We got to this point in the same way that Nazi Germany did. Germany was looking for a messiah figure to bring back German pride. Hitler literally used the phrase "Make Germany Great Again." Much of American Christianity wanted the same thing - a Messiah figure to bring back American pride and "Make America Great Again." The similarity in those phrases doesn't trouble me. It's the similarity in scapegoating that troubles me. Because both of these self-professed "Chosen Ones" use the same evil method of scapegoating to achieve their goals.

And American Christianity is in a crisis because it has turned its back on Christ.

Jesus is the Chosen One who refused to play the politics of scapegoating. Scapegoaters always go after the vulnerable. They are pathetic. But Jesus was no scapegoater. He always reached out to help the vulnerable. In our story today, Jesus was in a synagogue on the sabbath. A woman who was bent over for 18 years was also in the Synagogue.

This woman was suffering. Her back ached for 18 years. She hadn't had a sabbath, a day of rest, in 18 long years.

Jesus saw her suffering. He called her over to him, put his hands on her, and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." She immediately stood up straight and began praising God.

That's the role of the Chosen One. Everyone gave up on this woman who was bent over for 18 years. She may have even given up on herself. She was off to the margins of her culture. Many probably thought that she sinned and so deserved her situation. But Jesus didn't give up on her. He healed her.

Now here's the kicker - there were other healers during Jesus' time. Those healers [charged significant](#) amounts of money, whether the healing was successful or not. They were often imposters, so they left many sick people destitute.

Jesus didn't charge a dime. [He never charged a co-pay](#). He healed for free. People were not just healed, they were free from any burden of financial debt.

And at this good news, you would think everyone would rejoice!

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. The leader of the religious establishment became resentful. He accused Jesus of being disloyal to the law by working on the Sabbath.

Jesus didn't mince words. He called the religious leader a hypocrite. Jesus reminded his opponent that he would follow the law to care for his ox or donkey on the Sabbath - so how much more should he work to care for this woman on the Sabbath, who was a daughter of Abraham.

By calling her a daughter of Abraham, Jesus humanized her. She was one of the "others" who could be scapegoated and now he brought her back into the community. Abraham is the ancestor of the Jewish people. God blessed Abraham and his descendants. This woman was a daughter of Abraham. She deserved to be treated with blessings and as part of the community; she did not deserve to be cast aside.

For 18 years, the religious establishment didn't care about her. It treated her as someone less than a daughter of Abraham. And now Jesus was disrupting the status quo.

Jesus said to the woman, "You are set free from your ailment." Thank God for that. But she was not the only one with an ailment. The religious elite had a social ailment. Their ailment was scapegoating this vulnerable woman.

That was the ailment of the religious and political elite of Jesus' day, and I'm afraid it remains one of our main ailments today.

Today in the United States, we are debating who deserves medical treatment, who deserves housing, who deserves a living wage, who deserves to be called an American. There are forces and even people claiming to be the Chosen One who want to divide the world into us and them.

But Jesus didn't do that. The Chosen One didn't concern himself with whether the woman in our story deserved to be healed. He didn't care if she believed the right dogma about him. He didn't even care if she followed the law.

All he cared about was that this woman was a daughter of Abraham. Despite what any religious authority said, she fully belonged to the community. As such she was to be treated with dignity and love and care.

I want to follow the true Chosen One. I don't want to follow an imposter. Martin Niemoller warned us after WWII that it is very easy to follow an imposter. It's easy to hang out on the sidelines as he scapegoats various groups of people. Neimoller fell for the promises and even the scapegoating of a demagogue who thought he was the Chosen One. But he was an imposter.

And we have imposters today. Our job is to not get distracted by those imposters. Our job is to not hang out on the sidelines. Our job is to follow Jesus. Because there are a lot of sons and daughters of Abraham who need to know that they are loved. There are a lot of people created in the image of God who need help.

The prophet Isaiah gave the prescription for the social disease that ails our country. About 2,500 years ago, [he stated](#), "If you remove ... the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday."

In a very real way, Isaiah was talking about me. I have a way of pointing my finger at people. I may have done that in this sermon. Our job is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. That includes, as Jesus teaches us, those we call our enemies. But I can love them and not let them get away with scapegoating others. Because like Isaiah, we must name the darkness and the gloom in our culture so that our light can rise and help bring the noonday sun.

Friends, we have been called to follow the true Chosen One. Because in reality we are all chosen to share our blessings with those in need. May we follow the Chosen One today and forever more. Amen.