

## "HAUNTING HURT"

On **not** being chosen (selected, elected)

The case of Justus (Acts 1.23)

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1 Remember Peter's first speech in Acts (1.16.-22)? Traitor Judas fell, & (not just literally) "all his insides came out," making The Twelve short one, so "we need someone else to help us tell others that Jesus has been raised from death," someone "with us from the very beginning." (The CEV text continues:) "Two men were suggested....Joseph Barsabbas, known as Justus...and Matthias. Then they all prayed, 'Lord, you know what everyone is like! Show us the one you have chosen to be an apostle and to serve in place of Judas, who got what he deserved.' They drew names, and Matthias was chosen to join the group of the eleven apostles."

2 "The mystery of election" is what biblical theologians call noninclusive divine activity. When you get to thinking about it, it's also a mystery that the divine offer of forgiveness and "eternal life" is inclusive: God, for his part, wants nobody to lose out--& would himself seem to be, in that wanting, a loser. This Thinksheet is about a third reality, viz., the necessary leftovers from God's\*noninclusive elections--selections--choices: the **unchosen**.  
\*and people's!

1 I appeal to you: Read no further till you've thought of an instance of your being unchosen....You know why that incident was first in your recall: it's the most painful in your memory. You don't want to think about it, it still hurts so. The ghost of that old hurt comes back to haunt you again in the form of feelings you're not proud of or at least not happy about--anger, sadness, regret, defeat, hopelessness. And once again you cry out, if you're wise, for the healing of that memory, howsoever many times it may have been healed before.

"Three times I begged the Lord to make this suffering go away. But he replied, 'My kindness is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak.'....when I am weak, I am strong." (2 Cor.12.8-10)

If you will it so, as God desires you to will it, any remembered suffering, including the suffering of being passed over in a selection process, is a resource, even a gate of new life.

2 I've just returned from Sunday morning worship, after which our pastor announced she has lymphoma and must enter a program of intense therapy, requiring at least temporary retirement from her post. Her spirit is strong, her body weak. We pray both for the healing of her body & that she'll make great lemonade out of the lemon (as the secular saying goes) "life has handed her." An aspect of her new theological assignment, & ours, is to puzzle over how now she is both chosen & unchosen, selected & passed over. The mystery of tragedy, & of good & evil....

....& in the hour before worship, in a class on "Poetry and the Bible: Transcending the Story," some of us read poems we wrote for the session. This Thinksheet springs from one of the poems (not mine). It was written by a 66-year-old out of the pain of being passed over for a job seven years ago: "You're too old." Through the lens of that permanent pain, which character jumped out at him as he read the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles? A guy I probably couldn't have named if you'd asked me! That loser, that unchosen though he'd been with Jesus "from the very beginning." (He's in this Thinksheet's first ¶. Can you name him without looking? Maybe you remember his nickname, Justus; but can you remember his formal name? Unremembered is part of the pain of being unchosen.)

3 Geo.Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), is famous for a few phrases--especially these two: (1) "There is that of God in every man"; (2) The Word of God "speaks to our condition." As Loree & I read the Ecumenical Daily Readings in the morning & THE MESSAGE: The NT in Contemporary Language (Eugene H. Peterson, NavPress/93-96) on retiring, the Spirit in the Word & in our hearts speaks, always afresh, to our condition. And sometimes that Speech revives what our poet this morning poignantly called haunting hurts of our own or of our loved ones, & of the wider hurting world.

4 Each of our poet's six quatrains ends with the quiet self-affirmation, "Justus is my name." I, & my name, are not rubbed out when I am passed over, unchosen,

Is.53.3-12 CEV: "He was rejected....but...." 2982.2  
 Ps.118.22,23 qtd. in Mt.21.42, M.12.10,  
 L.20.17 CEV: "the stone....tossed aside....most important"

no matter how "forlorn" I feel at the time & on later recall. I--my-name is the medium: what is the message? Hear this doleful dirge of Marshall McLuhan (UNDERSTANDING MEDIA: The Extensions of Man [1964], pt.1, chap.2): "The name of a man is a numbing blow from which he never recovers." I am stuck with myself, & being stuck on myself only deepens my human predicament, as would my changing my name....which brings our poet to this fourth strophe: "Which choice for me? / Self-pity or humility! / Mercy given, feeling free, / Justus is my name." Biblical religion is about God-esteem as the "mercy"-grace cure for self-esteem. And to come to know this is to be more "free" than I could be merely by being chosen.

5 The French say "From success we learn nothing." If I were always the chosen, I would be deprived of learning the lessons only being unchosen can teach me. Is this rationalizing being passed over? Of course it is! That's bad if it's only a stratagem for maintaining self-esteem & avoiding self-confrontation; but it's good to the extent that it helps me accept a fact of life & learning, & not fall into self-pity's slough of despond.

5 The poet's choice of humility against self-pity brings him to his theocentric, anti-egocentric, next strophe: "Who's living for Thee? / Here I am Lord, / Send me, use me, / Justus is my name." And the last strophe decisively shifts the choosing center from a heteronomous other to the autonomous self: "Now choice is mine," / Serving Jesus, joyful glee, / Justus is my name." The last (25th) line breaks out of the quatrain structure: "My Lord and my God!" The paradox of biblical psychology: By paradoxical intention, we become by God's grace free from the anxiety to be chosen when we use for God's glory the haunting hurts of our not having been chosen. The unchosen may become choice.\*\*

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 Please tell me if you spot any **error** in a Thinksheet, as Theo.Fritsch did on p3 of 2973: I attributed to Arthur Miller "Inherit the Wind," a drama authored by Jerome Lee & Robt.Lee on the 1925 so-called Monkey Trial. My mind, I then realized, had jumped from a 20th-c. court-drama to a 17th, the Salem Witch Trials, on which indeed Arthur Miller did craft a play: "The Crucible," as serious a distortion of those trials as was the Lee-Lee distortion of the Scopes trial.

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