

Sermon for Sunday, January 6, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"PICKED OUT PEOPLE FOR A PICKED OVER WORLD"

Acts 6:1-7

Text: "Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute,
full of the Spirit and of wisdom whom we may appoint to this duty.

Acts 6:3

My wife always insists that I go grocery shopping with her on Saturdays. I pretend it is because she likes my company, but down deep I suspect it is because she wants me to carry the grocery bags! But there is one thing we have learned about Saturday shopping, and it is this: never shop late in the day. With Sunday coming up the stores are reluctant to replenish their stock. The bread racks are almost empty, awaiting the truck with fresh bread on Monday morning. The produce counter is a shambles and since the grocer won't put out fresh produce until Monday morning, all that is left is picked over seconds. Everything left is blemished or bruised or bad. So, late Saturdays you have to settle for seconds at the produce counter.

I got to thinking about that recently. In many ways ours is a Saturday afternoon world, all picked over with only the seconds left. Take for example our natural resources. We have wasted and abused our natural resources to the extent that we are now re-claiming picked-over gold mines, re-pumping worn out oil wells, and recycling the metal in junked automobiles. Actually, we are using our natural resources at an incredible rate and if you think things are bad now, what will it be like for our descendants in years to come? Yes, they will inherit a much picked-over world.

But when you stop to think about it, our world of humanity is pretty much picked over, too. Mankind is just seconds--we all have our bruises and blemishes. We have our defects and wormy spots. God's produce counter of humanity is left with nothing but seconds, a Saturday afternoon counter of picked over people. Those blemishes, those wormy spots, those bruises on us all are something the Bible calls sin. Do you remember how St. Paul described it? He said, "There is none righteous, no not one." He said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The Bible says, "If a man says he has no sin, he is a liar and the truth is not in him." Yes, a picked over world with only seconds left. God's produce counter of humanity has nothing but Saturday night left-overs.

The point I am making is this: when the Bible tells us that the disciples told the church to pick out from among them some special persons, they were picking out only the best of the worst. The men we have picked out to be officers are not perfect men. At best they are only the best of the worst. They have--as we all do--blemishes and rotten spots and bruised places. Does it shock us to realize that our officers are only the best of the worst? Well, it was true of the first century church as well. The early church had problems with its leadership, too. Sometimes we see the past through rose-colored glasses and we think the past was the ideal, the perfect. Yet, that was not true, even in the church. For example, Paul and Barnabas, the first two great missionaries of the church, had a falling out and parted company. And a trusted companion of Paul's--a man named Demas--ended up deserting him. Yes, God's produce counter of humanity is just seconds, picked over people with spots and bruised places. We ought not to forget that. We are dealing with men who are sinners. We are dealing with people who are fallen--men within whom the image of God is smashed and shattered.

But may I tell you some good news about God's produce counter of humanity? God has done something about bad produce. God has done something about spotted and blemished and bruised produce. Do you know what it is? Because of Jesus God is accepting seconds as though they were perfect! God is accepting you and me--because of Jesus--with all of our rotten spots, our blemishes, as though we were perfect.

That's pretty exciting, don't you think? God will do in you and to you just as much as you will let him do. He will take your life--with all of its blemishes and rotten spots, with all of its defects and bruises, and he will reshape it as much as you will let him. Are there things in your life that you are not happy about or pleased about? Are there defects in your character or your personality that need changing and transforming? The more you give them to God, the more he will change them and remake you.

Well, that is a terribly exciting thing to me. To think that God will take the seconds of humanity and begin to reshape and remold it in the image of the perfect fruit, the first fruits, even Jesus.

That brings me back to the officers who will be ordained and installed today. Just like us they come from the seconds counter. Just like us they have spots and blemishes and rotten spots. There is not a perfect one among them. Yet, the Bible tells us that there are those among us who are letting God work in their lives. Yes, there are--according to the Bible--people in the church who are letting God have more and more of their lives.

And do you know what? Those are the men the Bible says we ought to pick out to be our leaders in the church. Now, remember, they are not perfect. They have spots and blemishes. But the Bible says that God is at work in them and they should be the best on the world's produce stand. Now, what qualities do you look for to get the best off the world's produce counter? What are the things by which you judge and measure what is the best there is to have? In our text for this morning St. Peter gives us the key. He told the church, "pick out from among you.. men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.." I'd like for us to think together briefly about each of those three rules for judging the best available fruit.

First, the Bible says to pick out men of good repute. Now, a man can have a reputation. I know some people who have reputations, but they are very bad reputations. But the Bible didn't say pick out men with bad reputations. On the other hand, many people don't have a reputation at all. Think about that for a moment. Most of us here this morning don't have much of a reputation at all, either good or bad. For example, outside the immediate circle of your close friends, what do people know about you? So a person of good repute is one who had so invested himself in others, who has so invested himself in doing good, that he has gained a positive reputation in the world. So it is not sufficient to have a bad reputation or even a non-reputation. No, God's man is one who has so used himself for others that he has a positive report from the world. That's the first qualification for an officer. I have had men come to me and say, "Andy, I would like to be an officer in the church. The next time we elect officers, I would like to be considered." I always reply, "wonderful! But here are three criteria for an officer and the first is that you have a positive reputation in our community for doing good. Do you have that? And if you don't, go out and win that sort of reputation."

The second qualification is that we be full of the Spirit. Now, being filled with the Spirit is not something that happens once and never happens again. Actually, the Bible says to be filled and to keep on being filled with the Spirit. That's what this church needs. It needs men who keep on being filled with the Spirit, who stay filled to the brim with the Spirit. I have a minister friend who once had an Elder who was something of a jokester. One Christmas he invited my friend over and presented him with a very beautiful crystal glass that had some very elegant etchings on it. Of course, the minister was very pleased and his Elder urged him to try it out. Well, the thing was, some of those etchings near the top were etched all the way through the glass! Everytime the minister

took a drink, the glass dribbled all over him. He couldn't understand why every time he took a drink he got wet. I want to tell you that my soul is like that glass. It dribbles. I get filled with the Spirit, but the Spirit dribbles out because I leak spiritually. Do you have that problem? I know you do! That's why we not only need to be filled with the Spirit, we need to keep on being filled.

So, the Bible tells us to chose as our leaders men who keep on being filled with the Spirit--so much so that they are constantly level with the brim spiritually. You see, when a person doesn't keep himself filled with God's Spirit, bad things begin to happen in his life. And that's true for all of us. If we let our Spiritual level drop, we get ourselves in trouble.

The third thing the Bible says is to pick men full of wisdom. Now, there are many kinds of wisdom in the world. There is philosophical wisdom, there is scientific wisdom, there is medical wisdom and business wisdom and many others. But the Bible is talking about Godly wisdom. Over in I Corinthians chapter 1, verse 20, the Bible tells us that God's wisdom is different from the wisdom of the world. The kind of wisdom leaders are to have is spiritual wisdom. It is the kind of wisdom that seeks and knows God's will for God's people at a given moment.

Let me illustrate what I mean. As this church is growing in its membership, its attendance, its programs, what do we do for the future? I tell you, if we decide on the basis of human wisdom or financial wisdom or business wisdom, we will miss the boat. Let me give you another illustration. In the fall of 1978 when the Session (and I include myself here) set the budget for 1979, we set that budget on the basis of human wisdom. And that was a mistake. Human wisdom said the best we could do financially in 1979 was \$725,000. But God had other ideas. Actually, under the move of God's Spirit, in 1979 this congregation gave \$900,000. Your Session--including your ministers who are a part of it--have failed to have biblical wisdom. Unfortunately, we have done the same thing for 1980 and you have already far over-subscribed the Session's vision with God's vision. Maybe God's wisdom is for us to ask God's people to give their tithes to Him and then when the figures are in to try to use God's wisdom to put it where God wants it.

So we need men with God's wisdom. God is doing something very special with this church and this congregation and we need to have God's vision and God's wisdom for what He wants to do to us and in us and through us. God wants churches today who have a heart for Him, who share His vision, who have plugged in to his wisdom. Yes, what we need are men of good repute, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom. It is an exciting time to be a Christian and especially to be a part of what God is doing right here at Central. And we need the kind of leadership the Bible talks about, men of God who are of good repute, full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom.

Let me say one final word that applies to every person here. Yes, it is true that all of us are seconds on God's produce counter. We are bruised, blemished and wormy for we are a part of fallen humanity. But the fact is, every one of us can be better than we are. All of us can be different. The more we give ourselves to Jesus, the more he can change us and make us into quality produce. Whoever you are, you do not have to go home this morning just as you are. No, if you will surrender your heart and your life to Jesus, he will take you and change you and make you into a better human being. You can be different. You can have the joy and the glory of a changed life. It can begin right this minute if you ask God to begin to fill you with the power of his Holy Spirit. You can keep on being seconds on the counter of the world that slowly turns to garbage, or you can become a new creature in Jesus, born again, with a whole new future. You see, whichever you become depends on you and the decision you make.