

### "Ordinary People"

I am an ordinary person. I do ordinary things. By this I mean, I do the same things that all of you do. I say this because, since becoming an ordained minister, I have been surprised and a little perplexed to realize how many people think that if you are a minister, there is something about you that makes you not ordinary. I guess it surprises me because I know so many ministers and realize how ordinary they are.

I grew up as the only granddaughter with 7 boy cousins. About twice a month, we would gather at my grandparents' farm for Sunday lunch and an afternoon of fun and visiting. From the time we were small, my oldest cousin knew he wanted to become a minister. But he behaved the same way all of the rest of us did.

One day, we were going down to the river to wade and play on the rope swing and we came to a large ditch that had a tree that had fallen over it. We were taking turns crossing the ditch by walking on the log. Of course, while I was crossing, the log fell and down I went, into the deep ravine. ALL of my boy cousins and my brother just stood there looking at me until my aunt said, "Boys! Give her a hand." At this point they all started clapping. I don't recall the future preacher cousin praying for divine intervention or chastising his brothers for their smart aleck response. He just laughed and clapped like the rest of them.

Later, as an adult, my best friend dated a minister. According to her he was VERY ordinary. Like all the other guys she ever dated only better looking! And when my husband and I were dating, we were quite close to the young associate minister and his wife at our home

church. We would go out to dinner, to the movies, to their house to listen to music. He was just like all of our other friends, only he STILL preaches the best sermons I've ever heard.

Recently, a strange car pulled into the church parking lot one afternoon. Since I didn't know who it was, I took my cell phone to open the door – as I always do – and stood in the open doorway. A very nice African American gentleman had looked Nazareth up on the website and had a lot of questions about our history and especially the cemetery. I answered as best as I could and told him we could arrange a tour with someone more knowledgeable than I. Then I said, "I've only been the minister here about a year and there is a lot I don't know."

The man stepped back, took his hat off, kind of lowered his eyes and said, "You're the preacher. I am so sorry to bother you with this." I wanted to tell him that people bother me all the time and it was not a problem. Because I AM AN ORDINARY PERSON. Just like all preachers are. I sweat, I cry, I yell at the refs on the football field. And I really don't know why this surprises anyone! Because God has a history of calling ordinary people to do God's work.

Consider our Old Testament reading this morning. When God finally led Joshua and Caleb and the other children of Israel into the Promised Land and they had crossed over the River Jordan, God knew that they needed to establish an order. He said to Joshua, "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe . . ." God didn't say to select the oldest or the wealthiest or the smartest. God simply said to pick one!

Joshua must have picked some REALLY ordinary guys because we are never even told their names. No one ever mentions their abilities or contributions. And we know from Israel's history that the chosen people would go from there to make thousands of years of mistakes and bad decisions so we could assume that the leaders were not even THAT outstanding.

After years of God's people being SO ordinary, God came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Our New Testament lesson follows the baptism and temptation of Jesus, according to Matthew's timeline. This means that, immediately after being prepared to build God's kingdom on earth, Jesus realizes that he will need some helpers. It seems that, even when you are the Son of man, working in the "God business" is not a solo act. Jesus needed some followers – people called disciples, which literally means learners. Jesus picked some men and said, "Follow me". In Greek, he actually said, "come after me", implying that they would not be a part of any kind of greatness but rather subordinates to Christ. Just ordinary people.

And let's take a look at the fellows he chose. The first four disciples that Jesus called were fishermen. Ordinary people who caught fish for a living. They were not from the wealthy or the aristocracy. They were not found in the Temple, studying Scriptures with the great rabbis of the day. They were simple men who spent their nights on smelly boats in the middle of a lake, dragging up fish in nets.

And not only were they ordinary, but frankly they tended to be a little on the slow side. Simon Peter was named the Rock by Jesus, yet he was notorious for speaking before he thought. He would proclaim loyalty to Christ in one breath and then deny he knew him with the next. Can anyone relate? I love Peter because, those of you who know me well also know that sometimes as soon as I have a thought, it just flies out of my mouth. And I say, "There goes my St. Peter's disease, flaring up again!" What a comfort to see how Christ uses such an imperfect soul.

Then there were the brothers, James and John. They would listen to Jesus predict his own death and totally miss his point because they were busy arguing over who was the better brother. Matthew was a tax collector, hated by most Jews and probably a crook. Thomas lacked

faith so much that he would insist on being able to put his fingers into the wounds of the resurrected Christ before he would believe. And of course there is Judas. I mean, really? What was Jesus thinking we he got this bunch together? Maybe that is why we have nominating committees today to choose our leaders – in hopes of gathering a more qualified group!

But I believe that Jesus knew that he had to choose people that the world in general could relate to. Jesus knew all along that he was headed to the cross and that he had to spread the good news of God's love and God's plan for redemption to as many people as possible. So he chose people that other's would believe because they were so much alike. Fishermen, sinners, doubters and faithless people called by other fishermen, sinners, doubters and faithless people.

Friends, today WE are God's ordinary people. And we are called to do the same things as the early disciples. Now while we may not fish for a living, I suspect that there are a few sinners, doubter and faithless people among us. I know that on any given day, I could fit into any one of those categories. Yet, God is calling US, as surely as Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John so many years ago because we live in a world that is desperate to hear the Good News!

But I DO find myself wondering that if God's first century disciples were so ordinary, then how did they ever really accomplish anything. Well, you see, once Jesus said to them, "Follow me" they became EXTRAORDINARY. One way we know this is that Matthew tells us that "immediately" they left everything they had and followed Christ. Walked away from their businesses and their homes and their comfortable, ordinary lives to answer the call of God. Only someone who had extraordinary faith could do this!

Now, most of us have not been asked to leave EVERYTHING behind to follow the will of God but I DO believe that everyone in this sanctuary can and will hear the voice of Jesus

saying, "Follow me. Be fully committed to me. Make me the very first priority in your life and I will make you an extraordinary disciple".

God longs for us to step out in faith and make changes that might make us uncomfortable and love people that are unlovable. To minister to the children of the kingdom on earth – NOT just because they are in our church or members of our Circle or Sunday School class or because they live in our neighborhoods but simply because they have a need. And because they TOO are children of God created in God's image.

I read the story of a man who visited many churches of all denominations but could never find one that felt like home. One day, he came into a church a little late and the congregation was praying the prayer of confession. He heard them say, "Lord, we know we have not loved you as we should and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." With a sigh of relief, he sat down on the back pew and offered up his own prayer of thanksgiving, "Thank you Father for finally leading me to a church where I can fit in!"

Today, we are ordaining and installing Elders who will be the official leaders of this congregation for a period of time. They are ordinary people – educators, food service managers, office workers, and retired folk – who have answered the specific call of God to be a leader in this body of Christ. But friends, we are ALL called to do something for God because we are all that God has. Ordinary people – young mothers trying to balance home and choir and children; youth who want to come to youth group and have tests to study for; people with too much time or no time at all; preachers who yell at football refs - all of us called by God to use our ordinary lives to make disciples for Christ. To become extraordinary children of the risen Lord.

Later in this Gospel, Jesus commissioned all twelve of his disciples to go among the lost and proclaim the good news. He called them to cure the sick and raise the dead and cleanse the

lepers and cast out demons. And God calls us to do the same. And while those twelve followers were intimidated and wondered how they could accomplish such tasks, God empowered them for the work they were called to do. And I can assure you that by the authority of the Holy Spirit, God gives us what we need to do kingdom work. No matter how ordinary we are.

We may not be able to literally heal, but by our loving kindness to those who are in need, we can expose them to God's eternal healing. We may not have the power to cure, but by showing compassion to others and treating each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can help others feel God's curing presence. We may not be evangelists or teachers or preachers or elders, but by our everyday living as ordinary people who count on God's grace, we can bring others into the kingdom when we let them know that in reality, this grace means that no child of God is ordinary.

I studied a lot of "ologies" and "isms" in Seminary but the most valuable thing I heard while I was there was when our Christian Education professor exclaimed one day, "Grace is God looking at you and me and seeing Jesus Christ." And out of God's grace, God's ability to love us so much that he looks past our ordinariness and see the Christ that is in each one here, God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

If you have heard the call of Jesus saying, "Follow me", serve with courage and the knowledge that you too are filled with the Holy Spirit to do God's work with the gifts that God has given you. If you haven't heard this call, I pray that your heart and mind will be opened so that you may know Jesus and who he is. And as God's disciples in today's world, let us be encouraged and empowered by the steadfast belief that God uses ordinary people to reveal His extraordinary love to all in the kingdom on earth. Amen.