

“The Very Ordinary Apostle”; sermon delivered by The Rev. Chana Tetzlaff at St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church on May 11, 2024 Easter 7B, Text: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Every year, the clergy of the Diocese gather for a few days of retreat time with Bishop Jennifer at Waycross, our Diocesan camp in Brown County. A couple of years ago, the leader of our reflection time brought out a book – The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse¹ – and invited us to flip through the pages, cut out a page that “spoke” to us out of our reflection, put it in a frame and take it home as a reminder of something God wants us to remember. Mine sits on my office desk where I can see it everyday:

*“Sometimes I worry you’ll all realize I’m ordinary,” said the boy.
“Love doesn’t need you to be extraordinary,” said the mole.*

Love doesn’t need you to be extraordinary. Love only needs you to be faithful, to care about the people and purposes God cares about.

In a world of constant pressure to “be anything you want to be,” or “be the best that you can be,” whatever you do – whether growing up to become President of the country, or making art worthy to display in a gallery, or making a name for yourself amongst your colleagues – there is immense pressure to achieve, to be extraordinary, to stand out from the crowd. The Church isn’t immune to this culture of “achievement” either.

We commemorate Saints who go above and beyond the call of discipleship. We encourage our churches to stand out amongst the crowd in some way. We can easily get caught up in measuring success by the number of followers in the pews, or dollars in the plate, or whether our music or technology or liturgy or programs will attract more people to join us.

But our reading from Acts reminds us of this simple reality: Love doesn’t need you to be extraordinary. In fact, this passage could be called “The Very Ordinary Apostle.”

This moment takes place between two significant events: Jesus Ascension into heaven, and Pentecost, the arrival of God’s Holy Spirit, which we’ll celebrate next week. And there’s a lot going on to catch our attention. Jesus has just ridden a cloud up into the heavens, and the disciples stand around staring at each other. Suddenly, two angels appear and ask them “what are you waiting for? He’s not coming back right this second. You’ll know when he’s back ... he’ll be riding the same cloud.” So, not knowing what else to *do*, the disciples head back to town and spend several days praying. During which time *they* decide they need to replace Judas (who recently died a truly terrible death, which you can read about in the part left out of this reading). Because 12 is the number for divine perfection, so 12 apostles there must be to do whatever God wants them to do... Right? Because God couldn’t *possibly* work outside of those perfect parameters!

So they start asking around for recommendations. Who’s best for the job? Who’s most qualified? Who’s been present from the very beginning? Who deserves to join the inner circle tasked with growing and spreading the good news of God’s love through this new Way of following Jesus?

Two names come up – two names that *never appear anywhere else in Scripture*: Justus and Matthias. Now, the community must have significantly divided over the decision, and every debate between the two exhausted, because the disciples ultimately cast lots so *God* will show them who *God* wants



¹ Mackesy, Charlie. *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse*. Harper One Publishers, 2019.

to take Judas's place. Now, I don't recommend this practice for making important life decisions – it's a risky thing to ask God to handle your business, because God has this habit of working outside our perfect parameters, and God's solution likely won't be the one *you* imagine! But, God decides Matthias should be the 12th Apostle. And then.... *We don't hear any more about him*. Not the way we do about Paul, or Peter, or John. There are no gospels or letters telling how he exercised his ministry. There's *nothing* that distinguishes him *except* he was a faithful follower of Jesus who showed up, over and over and over again, to *share in the life* of Jesus and *witness* to God's restoring love.

That didn't stop the Church from trying to make Matthias noteworthy – there are several legends about what he supposedly did to share God's love that sprang up in the Tradition. But I find it comforting to know there was an Apostle who was rather... unremarkable. Because for every Paul or Peter or John there are 100... 1,000... 10,000... unremarkable, ordinary, faithful followers of Jesus whose names will never be known beyond the circle of people they are known to. And yet, they are just as important in the great cloud of witnesses who help grow and share God's unconditional love Every. Single. Day. In completely ordinary, unremarkable, but life-giving, ways that make God's love tangible, *here* and *now*...

...Through a prayer that helps someone who has lost their memory know they are loved and precious...

...Through the surprise of friendship offered by someone we didn't think knew we existed....

...Through generous forgiveness extended unexpectedly in spite of immense hurt....

...Through someone sitting quietly with us in our fear, or pain, or grief... and someone celebrating joyfully with us when a prayer is answered....

....Through just the needed word of hope spoken at just the right time when we aren't sure we'll find our way through....

So maybe we shouldn't worry about being ordinary.

Maybe being unremarkable and ordinary is actually part of God's perfect plan.

I don't know about you, but I take great comfort in this because there is freedom and grace in remembering: God just needs me to be more faithful than noteworthy. In fact, when I'm more concerned with achieving, with making a name for myself or being so perfect at what I'm doing that I stand out from the crowd, I exchange faithfulness for seeking significance. But the good news is that I, you, *we are significant simply because we are created by God and our purpose is simply to share generously, whatever we have to give, to the people around us*. Maybe that's sharing a skill or talent, a thing we are especially good at doing like making art, or music, or telling stories. Maybe that's sharing friendship, patience, trust, or kindness whether or not people deserve it. The ordinary things that make us human, given graciously and generously the way God gives to us, may have an impact we won't ever know and can't even imagine.

What is extraordinary about the Apostles is not that they are given superpowers to do God's good. What is extraordinary about the Apostles is that they faithful care about God's people and God's purposes, through very difficult circumstances, sharing God's love with people who *desperately* need to know *they are loved*. Love doesn't need you or me to be extraordinary. Just... faithful. Showing up over and over and over again, in places of pain and hope, sharing God's love and our care.... trusting God's ever-expanding love to do the rest.