

**November 15, 2009**  
**1 Corinthians 12:1-27**  
**The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**  
***Ordinary or Extraordinary?***

Ordinary or Extraordinary? That is the question.

It was just an ordinary day, like any other. The sun was high in the sky, heat waves warping the horizon, the constant smell and noise of sheep. Just an ordinary day for an ordinary shepherd, named Moses, who was tending his father-in-law's ordinary flock. Nothing turns an ordinary day into something extraordinary like hearing God speak to you from a bush, no ordinary bush, a burning bush without being consumed.

God wasn't just speaking to Moses from that bush. God was revealing God's extraordinary plans for the future to this ordinary shepherd. I imagine Moses liked what God was saying, at least in the beginning. God had heard the misery and suffering of the people, the Israelites, under the burden of Egyptian slavery. And God decided to do something about it. Imagine Moses getting excited at the thought of God liberating his people. "Yeah, God! Four hundred years of suffering is more than enough for my people. You stick it to those Egyptians. You go, God!"

But all that excitement quickly vanished at hearing God say, "No, Moses. Actually, I want you to go. You go and set my people free."

If Moses' heart wasn't pounding before, it certainly was now. Moses knew firsthand the power of Pharaoh, having grown up in Pharaoh's household. The idea that he could overcome Pharaoh and his mighty army was preposterous. Moses was no warrior; just an ordinary shepherd. He had no army; just an ordinary flock. He carried no weapons; just an ordinary shepherd's staff.

From Moses' point of view, all he could see was disaster. Here's the equation that probably rattled around in Moses' head:

*Ordinary Shepherd + Extraordinary Task = Spectacular Failure.*

That, however, is not God's equation. Never has been. Never will be. God's equation looks something like this:

*Ordinary Person + Extraordinary Task + Mighty God = Stunning Success.*

It took some convincing for Moses to "get it!" To get what God was saying... to fully understand that God's equation really does add up... In time Moses learned that God delights in doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. (If you take nothing else with you from this message take that with you.) *God delights in doing extraordinary things through ordinary people.*

We see this happening time and time again in the stories of the Bible. God called an ordinary shepherd boy named David to rule the nation of Israel. God called an ordinary woman named Esther to save the Israelites from extermination. God called ordinary people like Isaiah and Jeremiah to preach an extraordinary message to a rebellious nation. God called an ordinary girl named Mary to bear the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Jesus called ordinary guys like Peter, James, and John to be his disciples. This is God's way. This is God's equation:

*Ordinary People + Extraordinary Task + Mighty God = Stunning Success.*

This equation is written all over the pages of the Bible, and it's an equation that God longs to write all over our lives, as well.

The question is - are we ordinary or extraordinary people? Of course, we are all very ordinary people. There is really nothing that special about any one of us. We wake up with bed-head and bad breath. We start life all wrinkled and we end it that way. While we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God, we are still ordinary. The problem *is not* that we are ordinary. The problem *is* we tend to live by Moses' equation and not by God's.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth he reminded them -- as he reminds us today -- that each one of us is gifted in some way for building up God's kingdom in this place. God invites each one of us to participate in God's kingdom work on earth. It's a spectacular plan. The God of all creation - calls us, gifts us, empowers us, commissions us, and sends us out each day to be on kingdom assignment: ordinary people - you and me - on assignment for God.

I remember in junior high joining the basketball team. I enjoyed it, never missed a practice. But I never got to play in a game. Well I played in one game for a couple of minutes. I sat on the bench. I wanted to quit. I saw it as a waste of time. I didn't want to sit on the bench. I wanted to be in the game. Truth be told, I was absolutely no good at playing basketball. Never was, probably never will be.

Some of us feel that way in life. We feel as if we're on the bench and not really any good. Maybe you feel as if you're not good enough to play on God's team. You blew it in some area of life and now you think you are ineligible. Maybe you don't think you're good enough - skilled enough - experienced enough - to make the team. Maybe you were in the game once but it didn't work out very well, and you left feeling like a failure. You quit. Believe me I know all about quitting. Maybe you think playing on God's team would take up more time than you can give. You already feel too busy. Maybe you'd like to get into the game, but you don't know what position you're supposed to play on this team. I'm guessing that a lot of us could find ourselves somewhere in that list.

Allow me to set the record straight. Remember what it was like to be picked last for kickball in the playground, or not even make the team in high school or college? I

didn't make the high school basketball team. Forget about all that. Not an issue with God's team. God has already chosen you, not because you are extraordinary but because God's love for you is – extraordinary.

Years later after high school I was on a different team, a four man triathlon team. And we were unstoppable for five or six years. I have all kinds of trophies from that team. I was the cyclist and served on the team according to my gift, my talent.

God chose you for his team in the waters of baptism. God has already given you the uniform (a robe of righteousness). You're already on the team. The cross of Christ Jesus makes it so.

And if you don't think you've got the skills or the experience to play on God's team, good! God isn't looking for superstars. God is looking for people who will allow God's power to be at work in them and through them.

I don't know where or when I heard this phrase, you've perhaps heard me say it before. It rings true, "God doesn't call the qualified; God qualifies the called." (That is the second thing I hope you to take with you from this message this morning.) *God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called.* The reason is simple. When superstars do something, they get all the credit. When ordinary people, like you and me, do extraordinary things, God gets all the credit, as it should be.

This is what St. Paul is saying in our reading from Corinthians this morning. Each one of us brings something ordinary to the body of Christ. Each one of us has a part to play. And together - as we do our part - this team becomes extraordinary. And God gets all the credit. Without God we are just a bunch of ordinary people gathered together. But, with God, we can do some pretty amazing and extraordinary things in this place.

Moses learned that lesson over and over again. God told Moses that the reason he was using an ordinary shepherd like him was that, when the Egyptians sank to the bottom of the Red Sea, and the Israelites walked free from slavery and into the Promised Land, everyone would know, not that Moses was great, but that God was great.

If you think you don't have time to play on God's team, or you aren't sure what position you are to play, relax. Start right where you are. Consider whatever it is you're already doing as God's assignment. Whether you work in an office, study in a classroom, raise children, volunteer, or care for a sick loved one, know this, whatever you're doing right now IS God's assignment for you. It matters.

You are on God's team by grace. There is a place for every one of us to play regardless of our experience or qualifications. This faith journey is not a spectator sport. No one needs to be left sitting on the bench. God qualifies the called.

What would happen if we chose to see life that way? What would Friedens Lutheran Church look like if we all chose to live by God's equation?

*Ordinary People + Extraordinary Task + Mighty God = Stunning Success.*

Consider these three things:

First: We are all on the same team here at Friedens Lutheran Church and each one of us has God-given gifts and passions to be shared in building up the kingdom of God in this place. No one person is more important. Each gift we bring and share *is* important.

Second: Prayerfully consider what assignment God has for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to “nudge” you as you consider your involvement in this place. We gather regularly as the body of Christ to serve not to be served. (You will be hearing more about this in the weeks to come.)

Third: Every morning this week, before your feet hit the floor, remember God’s equation. Then consider saying a little prayer like this: “Lord, I’m available to you today. Put me on assignment, not because I’m extraordinary, but because you are.” And then live with your eyes wide open to the opportunities that God will put before you.

God delights in using ordinary people like you and me to do extraordinary things for Jesus’ sake. So be it! Amen.