

Ordinary servants

Luke 17:5-10

October 2, 2016

I want you to focus your minds. I want you to put aside all distractions. I want you to summon all your strength, all your willpower, all your determination. I want you to pour your heart and soul into this, and I want you to strive ... to be ordinary!

Why do we think it is something unusual, something extraordinary, something worthy of praise when someone forgives a hurt? When someone makes a sacrifice? When someone is generous? When someone makes a visit to an older person? When someone is kind to a stranger? When someone shows mercy? Why do we think it is something unusual, something extraordinary, something worthy of praise when someone loves an enemy?

We are only doing our duty. It is no more and no less than what God asks of us. No more and no less than what God expects of us. Because we are God's servants, God's ordinary servants.

In the politics of Jesus, there is no inner circle, no head table. There are no kings or bishops or right hand men. There are not different levels of Christians. You know: saints at the top, and the rank and file, average, trying-my-best-but-could-always-do-better Christians in the middle, and at the bottom, the C&E's -- Christmas and Easter Christians. No, there are only Christians, ordinary Christians, ordinary servants, called to do our duty.

Fifty-five years ago, a newly nominated candidate for president said:

We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier ... But the New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises -- it is a set of challenges. It sums up not what I intend to offer the American people, but what I intend to ask of them.

This candidate was asking us to be ordinary citizens.

Our system of government, our way of life, depends on ordinary citizens: casting out votes, paying our taxes, getting involved in our communities, thinking not just about our own welfare, but the welfare of the whole -- the whole community, the whole nation, the people as a whole. If ordinary citizens stopped doing their duty, our system and, indeed, our nation would fall apart.

But look where we are! A politics dominated by interest groups and issues voters, by wealthy contributors and Super PACs, all -- all of them! -- trying to bend the arc of government in their own favor and candidates all too willing to play along. When did you last hear a candidate ask you to make a sacrifice? When did you last hear a candidate ask you to do your duty? It's all about what I can do for you, what your country can do for you, not what you can do for your country.

We are no longer treated as citizens to be inspired to fulfill our sacred duty, but as consumers to be courted and enticed and mollified. We have become, no longer servants, ordinary servants, but spoiled children demanding our own way.

And so, I want you to focus your minds. I want you to put aside all distractions. I want you to summon all your strength, all your willpower, all your determination. I want you to pour your heart and soul into this, and I want you to strive to be ordinary! Can you see now? That I am serious?

The Lord expects no more and no less of us than we be ordinary, ordinary servants, only doing our duty.

But what can ordinary people do? What difference can ordinary servants make? What difference can you and I make just doing our duty, just believing enough to do what Jesus tells us to do, just having faith, even the slightest amount of faith, any faith at all, that Jesus' way is the way?

If you had faith as big as a mustard seed ...

Do you hear him? Do you hear Jesus? He is not scolding us for underperforming. He is not belittling our lack of faith. And he is not talking about relocating mulberry trees!

Jesus is telling us, you and me, that if we put our faith in him, if we make the choice to go with him and do what he does, everything we do, even the smallest thing we do, matters. Just by doing our duty, we will change the world. Just by being ordinary servants, we will bring the power of the Lord to bear, here on earth as it is in heaven.