

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 7, 2026
Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

"Ordinary to Extraordinary"

Back when I was about 9 I was a towheaded, skinny kid, who loved playing outdoors. My friends and I played baseball a lot and we chose teams the way most kids do; we chose two captains, which I hardly ever was, who would then choose team members. The captains always chose the best players first and eventually came to me and other friends who were decent players but not great.

I was thinking about that this morning as I wondered, "Why did Jesus choose someone like Matthew to be on his team?" Matthew wasn't among the first chosen; like me, he was chosen in the middle rounds of the draft. Still, it is puzzling why Captain Jesus would choose him at all. As a tax collector, Matthew was reviled. Tax collectors were lumped together with murderers and thieves. The religious authorities even allowed people to lie to tax collectors because they were instruments of the Roman Empire. Matthew seems a strange choice

But if we look at the history of who God chose to lead the children of Israel; people like Jacob, who was a scalawag, Moses who couldn't speak properly and David whose wandering eye got him in trouble, we shouldn't wonder at all why Jesus chose Matthew. Like father, like son. Jesus was a chip off the old block when it came to selecting followers. From the very beginning, God has chosen people who would not make it on anybody's "Who's Who" list. God didn't always choose questionable people, but the Lord did seem to have a definite tendency to go against the flow and choose the underdog. Most of the time he chose very ordinary people.

Take Abraham, for instance. Abraham was, in most ways the most ordinary person you would ever hope to meet. He had been relatively successful in his business life, but his family life was a mess. His personal life would make for a grand soap opera - he had an affair with his wife's maid and fathered a son by her and was constantly trying to keep the peace between Sarah, his wife, and Hagar, his mistress. Besides all this, he was old, very old by anybody's standards, with only an illegitimate child to pass all his earthly goods to. And then, one star-studded night, Abraham set out on an adventure, not sure how it would turn out, but sure that God would go with him.

Fast forward sixteen hundred years, we find Jesus tapping Matthew on the shoulder, asking him to team up with other mediocre men. We don't know much about Matthew. But what we do know is not very good. He was a tax collector which meant that he was in cahoots with the Romans, collecting their taxes and pocketing whatever extra he managed to extort from his hapless victims. Matthew the tax collector, like old Abraham, ventured forth on the basis of nothing more than Jesus' promise to make him a disciple.

The Bible doesn't explain the choices of God, it merely reports them. But I can tell you this: the people God chose were usually utterly ordinary folk, folk with their share of marital, family, and personal problems, folks whose past was not unsullied and pure, folk whose lives up to that point showed little promise for future contributions. In other words, God chose and still chooses people like us.

Maybe God chooses ordinary people so that when we see the extraordinary things God is able to do with them, we'll be all the more impressed with the greatness of God's grace. Maybe God just likes a challenge.

Have you ever noticed that when Hollywood has tried to portray some biblical character, the actors sound ethereal and otherworldly? Even the camera is filtered with halo-like softness. The characters almost always have this sort of faraway, dreamy, overly dramatic look about them. But that is not reality, is it?

The Bible is full of people who are flawed and very imperfect, just like us. Each one of us in church on this June Sunday is another story of an ordinary person like Abraham or Matthew who got called by God to be a disciple. Maybe our past business dealings are not as shady as Matthew's, or maybe they are. Maybe our family has never been in as big a mess as Abraham's, or maybe it's in worse shape. But just think about it - if God used even them, how much more God can use ordinary people like us to do extraordinary things?

Discipleship is not always spectacular, just faithful. All Abraham had to do was keep his mouth shut, keep moving, and father a child at age 100. All Matthew had to do was stand up, leave his computer in the tax office, stumble along after Jesus, and later write a Gospel.

Oh, another thing. Maybe we don't always feel like a disciple. Maybe we don't always think like a disciple. Maybe we don't always act like a disciple. While each of us would like always to think, act and feel like a disciple, today's scripture reminds us that our thinking, our feelings, and even our actions are not what make us disciples.

Our discipleship depends on what God has done first before we do anything. Our presence here in this church was God's idea before it was ours. We can take comfort knowing that the God who called us will keep us. In the world's eyes, those disciples going about their discipleship may seem like rather ordinary folk doing rather ordinary things.

But in the eyes of faith, the sort of eyes we are supposed to receive when we study Scripture, we see God doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. Great, even cosmic purposes are being worked out through us and all the other ordinary disciples of Jesus. Through God's call to each one of us, the Lord is busy changing the world for the better, even though the change may be miniscule, painful or puzzling.

The story of the call of Matthew reminds us that God chooses whom God will choose and that through us, God is accomplishing more than we will ever know - whether it's making coffee and fellowship treats, serving on the session or deacons, volunteering with Team Zimbabwe or the Parker Task Force, or working behind the scenes to keep our facilities inviting and functional.

We may not think of those ordinary things we do as fulfilling our discipleship, but they are. Whenever we joined Jesus' team: at our baptism or when someone invited us to church or we decided to put our faith into action, we may have thought we were doing the choosing. But in reality, it was Jesus choosing us to follow him mostly in very ordinary ways. The faithful followers in Berlin thought they were doing ordinary things in 1989 when they peacefully demonstrated against the tyranny of the Soviet Union and saw the Berlin Wall come crashing down.

But the extraordinary doesn't happen just on the global stage. Most of us don't set out to do something extraordinary, it just happens through the power of the Holy Spirit – like helping with Tamil Church VBS, or supporting Team Zimbabwe, or sponsoring youth group, or sponsoring a student at Dubuque Seminary.

With Jesus as our Captain, our ordinary efforts can accomplish extraordinary things. Believe this the next time you do something you think is quite ordinary that welcomes, loves and serves others. It's often when we ordinary people do the most ordinary things that God transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen