

Common, Regular, Extra-Ordinary Folk
Acts 1:1-8 – Read before message

We are common folk. We sit in the bleachers at football games, eat lunch after church at the Blueberry Cafe and drink coffee at Cops & Donuts. We change diapers and furnace filters. We wear our favorite team's t-shirts and caps. We are ordinary people. Fans don't wave when we drive by. Servants don't scurry when we come home; chauffeurs don't drive our cars; butlers don't open our doors; maids don't draw our baths; doormen don't greet us; and security doesn't protect us. We're just regular folk. We know how to get from today to tomorrow. We hope we can make a difference but wonder if we will really do anything of any lasting significance. Can we be the Acts 29 people the youth challenged us to be last Sunday?

I'm guessing the disciples may have been thinking something like that. Jesus, having died and rose again, began to instruct them quite intensely about the Kingdom of God and what the next steps would be for the mission. Before Jesus' death and resurrection a lot of what Jesus taught was difficult to understand, but now it all began to make sense. The disciples were desperately trying to soak up everything that Jesus was telling them, even though they weren't sure what they were going to do with all the information.

Only, Jesus' time with them had urgency about it now, like he wasn't going to be with them long. Once, as they were eating together, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until a gift had arrived. I can about imagine the conversation the disciples had that evening as they were settling down to bed after a long and intense day of Jesus' instruction:

“Kind of sounds like the Master is planning on leaving us soon, doesn't it?”

“Yeah, and he sounds real excited about it, too. He keeps on talking about the Kingdom and how wonderful and awesome it is. I'll have to admit, I really want to see this kingdom.”

“Me, too. Yet Jesus keeps talking about how he is going to leave us here to carry on the work that he began, and that he would send a gift.”

“What was it that he told us something about a comforter, counselor, enabler ...? Boy I wish I could remember all this stuff Jesus is telling us. I couldn’t keep up taking notes.”

“Tell me about it. I asked Jesus to slow down a little so I could ask him a question and he gave me the same answer he did the time he was giving us all that instruction before he ended up being crucified. He said not to worry about it. something about, ‘The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (Jn.14:26).”

“You know, the more I think about all this stuff Jesus is telling us, the more inadequate I feel. I don’t even feel close to having what it takes to do what he said. I mean, He wants us to turn this world upside-down, to rock this world with hope. I sure hope he’s not planning on leaving anytime soon!”

The Bible doesn’t record for us what the disciples said or thought; but I’ll bet it was probably pretty similar. I say this because these kinds of phrases, or something close to them, have been thought by many of you when a pastor, evangelist, or even just a close Christian friend has confronted you with the mission that Jesus left for us to do. (*Reference today’s Graduates*)

From the beginning, the church has always been a collection of ordinary people. We are part of a line of ordinary witnesses meant to spread the gospel locally and globally. Think about those first followers. There are several fishermen, a tax collector, and a couple of extremist looking to get rid of the Romans. They tried to one-up each other for position, questioned what Jesus did, denied they knew Jesus, sold Jesus out, and left him when he needed them most. Let’s face it; they were just a rag-tag bunch of guys who really lacked anything special. And yet this is the group that Jesus is expecting to rock the world with hope. Despite their ordinary natures, personalities, and vocations, they were the ones Jesus was positioning to be world-changers.

Today, we are the ones Jesus is positioning to be world-changers. We look at our own abilities, our own fortitude, our own conviction, our own ordinariness and say, “Me! You want me to do what? I can’t do that!” We join the disciples and ask Jesus, “Will you at this time

restore the Kingdom? Because if you do, then we won't have to worry about whether we have what it takes. After all, you will be here.”

I'm just an ordinary person. We're just regular people. True, but just because we look ordinary doesn't mean our potential to change the world is any less. The disciples were just ordinary people; but that's not what we consider them now. Paul started out persecuting the church; we remember him as a pillar of the church. Mother Theresa began as a poor girl from Albania. Billy Graham was just a hillbilly from North Carolina. John Wesley was the son of a poor pastor – and you know what they say about pastor's kids. Ordinary people and yet we remember them all as people who rocked the world with hope.

What turns ordinary people into world-changers? It starts with an understanding of who we are. In your bulletin you will find an insert that lists some unique qualities of a Christian that God has shared with us in the Bible. Coupled with who we are, there's the gift that Jesus told the disciples to wait for. The church was given an extraordinary power to rock the world with hope. The power, the energy, the fuel for the rocking is not us, it is the Holy Spirit. “You will receive all the power, all the confidence, all the adequacy you will ever need when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” Just as a car cannot function with an empty tank, so we cannot rock the world with hope on our own. We are powerless without the Holy Spirit.

To qualify for this power, we need to step into the global mission that Jesus has given us. The church is God's witness to the nations. Our mission is global; in other words, our mission involves ever expanding territories. Jesus told the disciples they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We are called to be Jesus' witnesses in the city of Clare, Clare County, Michigan, and to the ends of the earth.

Now the word witness in the church setting is often a scary thing. It should not be. To be a witness is simply to tell what you know and have experienced. We represent the truth of Jesus.

When I make visits in the hospital, it is not unusual for the patient to be hooked up to a heart monitor. This machine shows on a screen what the heart is doing, how it is beating. In a similar way, as witness to the world, we are to show others the heart of Jesus, what Jesus' heart has done and is doing, how it is beating with love for each individual and the world as a whole.

Our witness starts right where we are. It may be as simple as the conversation at our dinner table, or the conversation we have at a meeting downtown. It may include teaching Sunday school, or volunteering at Saturday Soup. I have a friend, now retired, who drives clients to doctor's visits for the COA in Cass County. AS part of his conversation with his riders he often asks questions like, "Where do you go to church." It's an innocent question that often begins a deeper conversation in which he is able to witness his experience of Jesus with others.

Our church is strategically positioned in this neighborhood, in this town, amongst its businesses, schools, and organizations in order to be a witness. But, don't forget that Jesus said "and" not "or". In the same way the early church was being sent out, so are we. We are to be witnesses in both our city *and* in ever expanding territories. So our focus must be local and global at the same time. We must go glocal.

Yes ordinary, regular, rag-tag people like us God has positioned to rock the world with hope, to be world changers. Still wonder what you can do?

A sobbing little girl stood near a small church from which she had been turned away. "I can't go to Sunday school?" she sobbed to the pastor as he walked by. Seeing her shabby, unkempt appearance, the pastor guessed the reason and, taking her by the hand, took her inside and found a place for her in a class. The child was so touched that she went to bed that night thinking of the children who have no place to worship Jesus.

Some two years later, this child lay dead in one of the poor tenement buildings and the parents called for the kindhearted pastor, who had befriended their daughter, to handle the arrangements. As her poor little body was being moved, a worn and crumpled purse was found. Inside was found 57 cents and a note scribbled in the child's handwriting which read, "This is to

help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday school.” For two years she had saved this offering of hope.

When the pastor tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he would do. Carrying this note and the cracked, red pocketbook to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion. He challenged the congregation to get busy and raise enough money for a larger building.

But the story doesn't end there. A newspaper learned of the story and published it. It was read by a realtor who offered them a parcel of land worth many thousands of dollars. When told that the church could not pay so much, he offered it to them for 57cents. Church members made large donations. Checks came from far and wide. Within five years, the little girl's gift had increased to \$250,000 – a huge sum for the early 1900's. Her unselfish love had paid large dividends.

When you are in the city of Philadelphia, look up Temple Baptist Church, with a seating capacity of 3,300 and Temple University, where hundreds of students are trained. Have a look, too, at Good Samaritan Hospital and at a Sunday school building which houses hundreds of children, so that no child in the area will ever need to be left outside. In one of the rooms of this building may be seen the picture of the sweet face of the little girl whose 57 cents, so sacrificially saved, began a movement to rock her world with hope.