

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26  
Psalm 1

1 John 17:6-19  
John 17: 6-19

Who is Justus? And who is Matthias? Our reading is the account of the disciples finding a replacement for Judas as one of the disciples. Judas was the disciple who had betrayed Jesus. Judas was the one who led the Roman officials to Jesus and identified Jesus. Judas is dead and the disciples decided that they need to replace Judas. They spell out the qualification of a disciple: he needed to be someone who had constantly accompanied Jesus while he was ministering in Israel. The candidate also needed to be one who had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who had seen the resurrected Lord. They found two candidates, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. But who are these men? What I find interesting is that these two men had been with Jesus all this time, and yet this is the first time we have heard of them?

With these two candidates, the disciples cast lots. In the ancient near east society, casting lots was believed to be a legitimate way of determining the divine will, of discerning God's will. In this case, there may have been two objects in a pouch, and someone would put their hand in the pouch and pick one of the two. It would be like flipping a coin: heads it will be Justus, and tails it will be Matthias. I suppose what that suggests is that when you folks are ready to choose your next pastor, you can have someone throw darts while blindfolded or flipping a quarter! I wouldn't recommend that, and I am not to be involved in any way, so I'll just leave it at that. By lots, Matthias was chosen as the new disciple, the disciple to replace Judas. Now they are back to twelve disciples.

Does it not appear to be a bit odd that we don't know anything more about Matthias than just this story. Not only do we know nothing about Matthias, not only is this the first time we hear about him, we never hear anything about him again. Never! Surely we should know something more about a disciple, about one of the members of the inner circle. These were the leaders of the very early church! These were not ordinary people! Evidently, Matthias had been with Jesus the whole time. He had been a witness to the resurrection, saw the resurrected Lord. Is it not a bit odd that we do not hear anything more about Matthias? In the next chapter Peter stands with the eleven to preach his Pentecost sermon. That would mean Matthias would have been there even though he is not named.

As Rev. Barbara Lundblad suggests, rather than being disappointed by having so little information about Matthias, we can be grateful for the witness of those who are so little known. It reminds us of the fact that God's ministry is done by ordinary people, by people like—you and me. This story affirms the little guy, the ordinary person, the mundane and boring person. God affirms the ordinary person!

Scott Schaffer shares that his favorite book is *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves*. Originally published in 1906, and reissued in 2000, this book collects interviews with a number of ordinary Americans - African-Americans, immigrants, factory and sweatshop workers, housewives and others - first published in Hamilton's reformist newspaper *The New York Independent* during the early 1900s. Their stories are, for the most part, unremarkable: how they got to the United States, what they do with their days, what their aspirations are, how they think of America and their homelands. So what makes it his favorite book? Precisely this: the stories are

ordinary, reflecting the lives of most of the 30-odd millions who lived in this country at the turn of the last century. It's the poignancy of this ordinariness that gets him when he reads this book - this is all they are, and *Undistinguished Lives* captures it all without any kind of denigration ... It wasn't the Roosevelts or the Carnegies or the Kennedys that made America great. It was the ordinary people.

Tom Brokaw, in his book *The Greatest Generation*, wrote about those who grew up in the United States during the deprivation of the Great Depression, and then went on to either fight in World War II, or those who worked hard and whose productivity within the war's home front made a decisive material contribution to the war effort. These people were ordinary people who simply did the right thing, enabling us to win the war. It wasn't the rich or the famous or the well-known, but ordinary people who won the war for us.

It is the same in the kingdom of God, in the church. God calls ordinary people more than he calls the well-known and famous. Richard Lischer, in his book *Open Secrets: A Spiritual journey through a Country Church*, wrote about his initial disdain for having been assigned by the church authorities to a little rural congregation in New Cana, Illinois. He had a PhD in theology, and surely he knew more than these farmers did. "Of course I knew that Christendom needed unstrategic little churches like this one," he said, "but I bitterly resented the bureaucrats who misfiled my gifts, misjudged my obvious promise, and were about to place me in rural confinement." In his first sermon he quoted James Joyce, Heidegger, Camus, and Walker Percy. "It didn't occur to me ... that Marx's critique of religion rarely came up for discussion at the post office." Looking

back on that sermon, Rev. Lischer knew he had failed to honor the ordinary people of faith sitting in those pews:

Why couldn't I see the revelation of God in our little Church? In our community everyone pitched in and learned how to "pattern" a little girl with cerebral palsy. We helped one another put up hay before the rains came. We grieved when a neighbor lost his farm, and we refused to buy his tools at the auction. As a people, we walked into the fields every April and blessed the seeds before planting them. Weren't these all signs of "church" that were worthy of mention in the Sunday homily? Whatever lay closest to the soul of the congregation I unfailingly omitted from my sermons. I didn't despise these practices. I simply didn't see them.

It seems like we live in an age when we are all pushed to be great. Greatness seems to be an idol in our society. Whether it is being a star professional athlete, a powerful political official, a wealthy entrepreneur, or a great movie star, we have to be great at what we do. But, what is the matter with being ordinary. Nothing! God's kingdom would accomplish nothing without the ordinary people. The church would be nothing without ordinary people. The mission work of the church is accomplished by ordinary people. John Buchanan, who was the senior pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, Illinois, in his sermon called "The Ordinariness of the Christian Life," preached in January of 1992, spoke about the ordinariness of the gospel; "that's where it is for most of us, slugging it out day by day, trying to make ends meet, and to be as good as we can at what we do, and to use what we have responsibly, trying to be honest and kind and just." You and me, ordinary people, we are the kind of people God wants and needs.

All authority and power and dominion  
to the name that is above all names—  
Jesus Christ our Lord—  
now and in the age to come. Amen.