

**SERMON SERIES: HOW GOD USES ORDINARY PEOPLE
FOR EXTRADONARY PURPOSES: THE OVERLOOKED
PEOPLE OF LENT**

SERMON: “The Man Carrying the Water Jug”

SCRIPTURE: Mark 14.12-16

Name two people who have announced their candidacy for the Democratic Party’s nomination for president.

Now name one person who answers the telephone or sends emails at the candidate’s headquarters. None of the many candidates has a chance of getting the nomination without the help of many ordinary people doing mundane tasks on his/her behalf.

What is true of these candidates is also true of Jesus.

To complete his mission he needed ordinary, often unnamed, people to fill key roles.

Today, on this first Sunday of Lent, we begin a sermon series, titled “How God Uses Ordinary People for Extraordinary Purposes: The Overlooked People of Lent.” (1) Their stories are interesting. We will find parts of ourselves in each of these people. We will learn much from them about how to follow Jesus.

Consider the man who carries the water jug. Here’s the situation: Jesus is in danger. So are his followers. His opponents have murder on their minds. They have decided Jesus is to be eliminated. Judas has already decided to betray Jesus into their hands. He is looking for an opportunity to do so. Jesus knows what is in Judas’ heart and he is concerned Judas may act before he has had occasion to celebrate the Passover supper with the twelve. Much is at stake. If Jesus is arrested before the Passover

meal, he will not be able to institute the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

We mark significant moments with significant meals.

Rehearsal dinners, retirement dinners, Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, year-end banquets, are examples of such meals. They feed our souls as they do our bodies. The Passover meal is the supreme festival of Judaism. At this meal, with a very specific menu, Jews remember how the Angel of Death passed over them, while claiming Egyptian firstborn, as God liberated Israel from captivity in order to make the exodus to the Promised Land. The Passover meal is a deeply religious event in which participants remember and celebrate God's sovereign love and providence. (2)

Jesus knows his death is fast approaching and he is determined his last Passover meal with his disciples will happen.

Luke reports that during the meal Jesus told the disciples, *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"* (Luke 22.15) This meal will say what he most wants to say to his followers. He will tell them what his death will mean: Namely, that by it, Sin and Death will be defeated, they will receive life eternal, and God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. His crucifixion will fulfill and complete the Passover. He is the true Passover lamb. He will give new words for the Passover liturgy, which speak of his body broken and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sin and for the remembrance of him. He will give them the Lord's Supper sacrament.

So, Jesus takes control of their Passover planning.

Because Judas has determined to betray him, secrecy is necessary. He sends two disciples into Jerusalem with a coded message. *"Go into the city and a man carrying a*

water jug will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, "The teacher says, 'Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room, furnished, and ready; there prepare for us."

Jesus is protecting himself and securing the secrecy of the location by sending only two disciples to make preparation. Passover was celebrated on the "*first day of unleavened bread*," which was Nissan 14 or 15 on the Hebrew calendar or between March and April on ours. Passover lambs were slaughtered on "*the first day of unleavened bread*" and were eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. These two disciples were to have a lamb sacrificed at the Temple, roast it, prepare side dishes, and secure the location. Their sign would be a man carrying a water jug. (3)

How would they know which man carrying water to follow? There will only be one. Men did not carry water jugs in 1st century Israel. It was unseemly for a man to do so. In the ancient world only women performed this task. A man carrying a water jug would stand out and would be looking for them. So, the two hand-picked "*disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as Jesus had told them, and they prepared the Passover.*"

What can we learn from the man who carried the water jug? He is a prime example of how God can use ordinary people for extraordinary purposes. Christians have been nourished and blessed at the Lord's Table for twenty-one centuries because of this secret, unnamed man. God can use anyone willing to be humble, obedient, and courageous.

HUMBLE – Nothing in 1st century Judea would have been more humbling to a man than publicly performing a task assigned to women. This guy was either very sure of his masculinity or so dedicated to Jesus that he would accept the embarrassment to keep Jesus safe or both, that he carried a water jug in the streets of Jerusalem.

In my church in Pennsylvania we had a bell choir of senior highs. For years it was all girls and the occasional freshman boy who carried over from the middle school ringers, then dropped out when he became a sophomore. That changed when Sean Putney agreed to ring. Sean was a linebacker on the football team and a star on the hockey team. He agreed to ring out of loyalty to Becky Borthwick, our choir director. When Sean played bells, it made it OK for other boys to play as well. After he graduated and went to college, Becky would often say, “What I wouldn’t give to have another Sean Putney!” God uses the Sean’s of the church who humble themselves before their peers to serve Jesus.

OBEDIENT – What do you think the conversation was like when Jesus or his friend asked this man to carry the water jug in the middle of crowded Jerusalem? “You want me to do what?” Gender roles have changed significantly in the twenty-one centuries since this event occurred. Gender dystopia has been named, and whatever one may think of gender bending, it is rare but exists. Still, even today most men shy away from public embarrassment related to their masculinity. Yet, the man in our story carried the jug. He was asked and he obeyed.

There is so little we know about this man, so much we'd like to learn about him. Did Jesus ask him directly or through his friend who owned the house with the upper room? Was he a disciple of Jesus who was not one of the twelve but none-the-less a sincere follower? Obviously, the homeowner knew Jesus and agreed to make his home available. Probably this man was as N.T. Wright described "Jesus secret friend." Whatever the case, he obeyed the request or directive and carried the jug. God can use people will obey his call to listen to Jesus.

COURAGEOUS – This man put himself at risk. The whole point of this exercise was to protect Jesus and the twelve from Jesus' murderous opponents. Do you think they would feel kindly toward one who had screened him from them? An accomplice? After Jesus' arrest the twelve scattered. Peter denied knowledge of Jesus. This man knew what he was getting into but did so anyway.

John McCain told of his time in a prisoner-of-war camp. One day one of his guards came to him and loosened his chains, so he could and massage his aching muscles. The guard returned at the end of his shift to retighten the chains. He did so on other occasions as well, always surreptitiously, so the other guards would not know what he had done. He never made eye contact with McCain. One day when no one else was around, he returned to John, loosed his chains, and made the sign of the cross in the dust. The two men stood looking at it in a silent moment of worship. Then the guard rubbed it away, so it would not be detected. The guard served Jesus by serving John McCain with courageous acts of kindness.

Jesus went to great effort to celebrate Passover undetected or harassed in order to give us the sacrament of communion. But he did not run from the cross. He went willingly to his death. He declared, “*No one takes my life from me, I give it.*” He demonstrated great courage for an extraordinary purpose. But he could not have achieved the salvation and redemption of the world without this unnamed, ordinary man, who humbly, obediently, and courageously carried the water jug. God can use anyone willing to be humble, obedient, and courageous. Even us.

You never know the possibilities for good that may flow from even the most menial tasks. Within the providence of God extraordinary results ripple from ordinary actions. This man forever elevated the task of water carrier. Every water carrier may now carry out their job with the thought it may be for a special person or cause.

GOD USES ORDINARY PEOPLE FOR EXTRAORDINARY PURPOSES!

Sources:

1. I received the idea for this sermon series from my friend, the Rev. Dr. Robert Simmons, then pastor of Goodyear Presbyterian Church in Goodyear, Arizona. I use his thoughts as resources in this series.
2. Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, SPCK, p.193.
3. *English Standard Version Study Bible*, footnotes in Mark and Luke.