

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

David Beckmann

RCL: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42 LM: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3;
John 1:29-34

Both the Old and New Testaments are brimming with examples of how God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. God calls us all, regardless of the ability we perceive in ourselves, to do God's work. Through us God can accomplish miracles.

Isaiah says that the Servant was called to God's work before birth. God has plans for us even in the womb. It is amazing that God has involved us *at all* in bringing about God's purposes on earth. Even we sinners—all of us—have roles to play.

We see this point illustrated in John's version of Jesus' calling his first disciples, including Andrew and Simon Peter. These two are fishermen, poor, and likely not men of power and status. They aren't kings or priests or rabbis; they are simply people whom Jesus calls to do God's work.

Understanding that God has purpose and plans for every person makes it even more heart-rending that so many people in our world are debilitated or die of hunger and hunger-related diseases. Surely this is not what God desires for their lives. God's plans for us may well include a role in changing the world so that hungry people will have enough to eat.

Some of us are led to ministries, like working in soup kitchens or food shelves, which deal with immediate needs. Others are called to tutor a child or help with a community organization. And some are pulled toward dealing with root causes of hunger through advocacy and lobbying members of Congress about hunger issues.

When a person responds to God's beckoning, amazing things can happen. A few years ago Pat Pelham of Birmingham, Alabama, heard a call from God to somehow respond to Africa's needs. It led her to get involved in Bread for the World. She and others spoke to their representative in Congress, a conservative Republican named Spencer Bachus, about debt relief for the world's poorest countries. They convinced him to work for debt relief and for policies that would direct the money that countries would have spent on debt repayment toward services for poor people. Representative Bachus was moved by the group and became a leading and effective advocate for debt relief.

Thousands of Christians and other people of goodwill around the world worked for debt relief for the poorest countries, many as part of the ecumenical Jubilee 2000 campaign. Because of debt relief, more children are now in school and more medicines are in rural clinics in some of the world's poorest countries. And it probably wouldn't have happened without the leadership of Representative Bachus and, before that, the active faith of Pat Pelham.

Pat and her friends didn't feel that they had any special talent when they went to speak to Representative Bachus, but they did have a conviction that our powerful government should do more to provide help and opportunity to poor and hungry people worldwide. Their conviction swayed Representative Bachus. And God

clearly used them!

A part of this week's readings that really struck me was the reference in 1 Corinthians 1:5 to knowledge and speech. Paul later in the letter criticizes the people in the Corinthian church for how they use these gifts. But Bread for the World helps people use their gifts of speech and knowledge to help hungry people. We learn about the underlying causes of hunger (partly by reading Bread for the World materials), and we then speak to others in our churches and to our representatives in Congress about government policies that can give hungry families a better chance to provide for themselves.

Children's Time [LH]

Remind the children of times when we play games and choose people to be on our teams. We choose people because they play the game well—if it's baseball, because they can hit the ball or can throw well; or if it's basketball, because they can shoot baskets. This week and next, the Bible stories include Jesus' calling his disciples to follow him. Jesus chose disciples because he needed them to do things—to go out and tell others the good news that he brought and to do good things for others. The disciples were ordinary people like us, but Jesus asked them to join him to do some pretty awesome tasks. Jesus invites us to follow him too—to share God's love with others.

Musical Suggestions [LH] I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord)—BP 129 The Summons—FWS 2130 We Are Called—GC 718 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service—LBW 423