**Here’s to Us! Here’s to Love!**

**Stewardship Sunday**

**May 5, 2019**

Matthew 4: 18-22

Acts 10: 1-17, 34-48

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFEarBzelBs>

That ad is from a 1997 Apple campaign titled “Think different.” “Here’s to the unusual ones…the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square hole, the ones who see things differently…. The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones that do.”

The scriptures for today are about the calling of unlikely, ordinary people who, in the end, accomplish extraordinary things that change our world forever. We all know someone in the “ordinary heroes” category, someone like Mary Dickson from Amherst, Nova Scotia, who, through the encouragement of her UCW unit, has handed out over 80 prayer shawls to people in need. The gift of a prayer shawl can seem like a simple thing until you are the recipient—it is as if you can feel and are wrapped by all of the prayers that have been poured out during the creation of the shawl. I have been told by many people, how meaningful receiving and using a prayer shawl is for them as they go through a difficult time. They know they are held in love and prayer when a prayer shawl is wrapped around them. An ordinary act that creates extraordinary healing!

This is an example of what it means to be a disciple—to live or act out your faith. In the biblical world, there was a tradition of teachers called rabbis who would choose the best of the best from among young boys who attended school in the Temple. The boys would be around the age of 13 years and they would be chosen to be apprentices, to learn the ways of the rabbi. All other boys would return to their families and work in the family businesses. In the Gospel of Matthew, we read about Jesus calling fishermen to become his disciples, his apprentices. In this situation they were not necessarily the best of the best; they would be ordinary; and yet they were being called to the extraordinary life of a disciple. The meaning of the word “disciple” is a person who tries to live and preach the ways of their leader. So the disciples were taking on the extraordinary life of being like Jesus, healing and preaching the Word. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to come and follow him and be fishers of people, to preach to people the words of Jesus; then Jesus calls them to also heal people. These ordinary people who, at times, seem to be clueless, are chosen, chosen to speak and heal, and chosen to change the world.

When you think about it, if these ordinary people could be called to follow the life of Jesus, that gives us hope as well. I don’t know about you, but I rarely feel like the best of the best. I can sometimes feel inadequate, overwhelmed, or not good enough, and wonder how I can accomplish the tasks before me, or do a good enough job with what is expected of me. Reading about the disciples and their times of cluelessness encourages me to move forward, to make a difference, knowing that I am enough, that God is with me, has called me to this and that I have the gifts to accomplish what I need to.

We are all called to live in faith, offering compassion and hope to those we encounter. We are also called to share our gifts with our partners and ministries of Mission & Service, those whom we have not met in person, but know through the stories of Mission & Service found in Minutes for Mission and *Mandate* magazine. Following in the way of Jesus is two-fold—giving both locally and beyond our community. Following the teachings of Jesus to love one another and to love our neighbour is at the very core of our faith. Love is the one constant; when we love one another, it fills our heart and the heart of the person whom we love. We may not like what that person is doing, but we can still love them. Loving one another is one of the most profound ways we can offer compassion and hope to those we encounter, because through that love, others can be encouraged to take a chance on accomplishing extraordinary tasks.

On March 14, we had pie day, 3-14, the international day of Pi. Our affirming ministries of The United Church encouraged congregations across the church to have a PIE day, to celebrate, ‘Public, Intentional, Explicit’ welcome of LGBTQ folk in our communities. It is about love. We gathered for a bit of a fair and some storytelling. We had contacted some of the local Gender and exuality Alliances, GSA’s in the city to see if there were any youth who could come and share their story. There was one young person who wanted to come but couldn’t because they are not out and couldn’t get here. However, Apollo, was so interested and happy to share their story that they sent a video, which I would like to share with you now.

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-9ymaN7bSeHbIxc4PAXaWggUMw-oQBn_Vdu4jmuamTg/edit?usp=sharing>

Today is also Affirming Ministry Sunday, and Apollo’s message is a reminder to us of the importance of love and acceptance, and the intentional welcome we work toward as affirming ministries. Sometimes that means expanding our love to those we may have excluded or not understood in the past. This was the experience for Paul in the story from Acts today. Paul had a vision that included animals that traditionally were considered unclean, but God told him in the vision to get up and eat them. This happened three times, and he was greatly puzzled by its meaning. It became clearer to him when he was led to Cornelius, a gentile who was directed by an angel to find Peter and listen to him. Peter realizes the vision was related to God bringing Cornelius to him to preach the good news. In verse 28, which we didn’t read today, Peter says: “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean”. God’s message is that all are to be included, loved and welcomed. That is our calling. That is our challenge, both for ourselves and to others who may struggle with such a radical, inclusive love.

Let me tell you another story. In Hamilton, Ontario, there lived a man named Roger. He had spent the majority of this life homeless, addicted to drugs and alcohol, one of “the lost and least” whom we all encounter on city streets. Roger believed he was headed toward an early death until he encountered Wesley Urban Ministries; the people there loved him back to life. He is now clean and sober and lives in a one-bedroom apartment above Wesley Urban Ministries in downtown Hamilton. Roger will tell you that without Wesley he would be dead. This story illustrates the result of an extraordinary act. Ordinary people called to the extraordinary, called to change people’s lives. Who are those ordinary people in your life, in our community of Eastside who do extraordinary things? I invite you to share with one another today after church, a story or example of this. We have had another example of incredible generosity this week – extraordinary things from ordinary people. Thursday afternoon, a member of the congregation told me she had negotiated with her husband to donate the amount needed to clear our Presbytery region debt. Because of so much loving generosity in this community, we have cleared the outstanding extraordinary debt we had. So here’s to those who change things, those who push the human race forward in love. Here’s to us, the ordinary, called to do extraordinary things, called in faith, to change and mend the world! Amen.