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Proper 6 A

Comedian Woody Allen once remarked about himself: "My one regret in life is that I am not someone else."

We have all had times in our lives when we could personally identify with those sentiments. These sorts of feelings seem especially intense when we face great challenges and we believe ourselves to be inadequate to the task.

In today's gospel we hear the story of Jesus' calling of the disciples. This account seems all well and good when we hear this as the story of their call. But this calling business takes on a whole different perspective when we hear it as a reference to our own calling as Jesus' disciples. We convince ourselves that we just don't have the same sterling quality of character and gifts to work miracles that the first disciples possessed in such great abundance.

Jesus' marching orders are tall ones: proclaim the Good News of God's love; let people know the Kingdom, the reign, the presence of God is near to them; cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. We reassure ourselves that Jesus did not mean for us to do these sorts of things. Those very specific instructions were only for the first disciples, Jesus' especially chosen and (we tell ourselves) uniquely gifted cronies.

This is a comforting line of logic but I'm afraid that, as the old southern saying puts it, "That dog don't hunt." The truth is that you and I, if we are followers of Jesus, or trying to be followers, are called to be disciples who are living out the very same job description we heard in today's gospel.

The problem is that sometimes we just don't feel as if we have the qualifications to live up to such a lofty goal, to be a disciple who loves as Christ loved and serves the world with the compassion and ardor of Jesus himself. We tell

ourselves we are inadequate to the task. We are too ordinary, too busy, too ill informed, too filled with doubts, to engage in the type of ministry performed by those first disciples.

Now your mindset about discipleship may be a bit different than the one I have just sketched, but I suspect that each of you thinks and feels, at least some of the time, inadequate to the task of discipleship. So today I want you to look beyond your excuses and perceived shortcomings as we consider briefly some of the facts about discipleship.

First of all, God seems always to have chosen ordinary people like you and me to accomplish God's purposes. We hear names of folks from the Bible and make the assumption that somehow they were especially gifted and holy. Wrong! Actually, the people we hear about in the Bible were not just ordinary people; they were often deeply flawed and inadequate individuals.

Consider these Old Testament characters. Abraham was an old man called out of a prosperous retirement to start a new nation. Not only was he too old for the job he had a penchant for lying when it suited his purposes. David was a very young shepherd chosen by God to create a unified Hebrew nation, yet he also turned out to be a murderer and adulterer. Moses, the great lawgiver of Judaism, was a murderer, a stutterer, and a very reluctant leader. The prophet Hosea's wife was a prostitute. The prophet Elijah suffered from depression.

Moving on to the New Testament: Martha was a worrywart and she thought her sister Mary was lazy. James and John were power hungry. Peter was impulsive and had a temper.. Thomas was filled with doubts about Jesus. Jesus himself was seen by many as mistaken about his own religious traditions and as far too forgiving and lenient with people.

The bottom line here is that, speaking both biblically and practically, being ordinary, being less than a stained glass saint does not disqualify you for discipleship. A church historian I know of defines a saint as "someone whose life just hasn't been adequately researched."

The primary quality it takes to be a disciple is a desire to follow Jesus in serving others and having a heart that seeks to be a healing and loving presence in the lives of people who are hurting.

This congregation has many disciples who understand this.

You are living as a disciple when you help with hospitality here at St. Mary's, or work with the Thursday food delivery program that brings groceries to those who are poor and whose mental or physical or financial health prevents them from obtaining enough to eat on their own. St. Mary's has disciples who pray daily for those on our prayer list and who also respond to prayer requests the congregation never sees.

Discipleship is evident among the many people responsible for assisting with worship, or who assemble our Cow Hollow Church News for mailing four times each year. There are folks who serve as sponsors at baptism or are sponsors and active members in a 12-step group. The list of discipleship ministries is as extensive as the multitude of events, programs, activities, and groups here at St. Mary's. I'm especially delighted with our involvement with the interfaith Faith In Action organization that works to make our city a better place for all and also for our parishioners who are exploring ways in which we can assist immigrants who are being targeted by the government.

Discipleship is also lived out in the unique ways in which you reflect the love and healing presence of Jesus beyond the church walls in the places where you live and work.

Today, in a very few minutes, we will hear who the next rector of St. Mary's will be. This announcement comes as a result of a search process that involved 12 parishioners faithfully meeting here on a weekly basis for more than a year, plus many of these same folks took their weekends to visit potential rectors all over the country. They spent thousands of hours in this process and then the vestry carefully vetted the three clergy who visited St. Mary's.

After discussion and prayer, they extended a call to the one who seemed to possess the skills and qualities that will best suit the needs of this parish. None of this work was glamorous but it was essential in discerning whom God was calling to be the chief disciple at St. Mary's.

What I ask each of you to do today is to hear anew your marching orders from Jesus. You may not be perfect but that dear friends is no excuse for failing to be a disciple. As Martin Luther once commented, "God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick."

There is no need for you to ever be filled with the kind of regrets expressed by Woody Allen. You do not have to wish you were someone else. God loves you as you are and calls you to discipleship as you are. Not that each of us doesn't have growing and maturing to do, regardless of our age.

God is not finished with any of us yet. But ordinary though we may be, God has extraordinary work for you and me to do. Remember that Jesus left us to carry on the ministry he began. He had no other plan for fulfilling God's desires for creation and human life than us.

When you leave St. Mary's today, leave as an active participant in what our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, refers to as "The Jesus Movement." Know that at the core of your being you are a Jesus' person, a disciple, filled with God's Holy

Spirit. God's Holy Spirit calls you as you are right now, to lift high the cross of Christ, a holy cross that embodies the mission of Jesus, a mission filled with love, mercy, compassion, and healing for all people. AMEN