

Most everyone knows who I am talking about when I say Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King Jr.

But what about the people who worked alongside Mother Theresa, wiping the sweat off of patient in India’s sweltering heat?

What about Fannie Lou Hamer and those thousands of others who registered African Americans in the South when all others turned away?

...And what about The Man not the Subway?

About 14 years ago I interned at the Smithsonian’s Museum of American History. I lived with my cousin and Reston so each day I took the bus and subway to and from work. I loved the ability to read uninterrupted for two hours each day. Then the Man on the Subway decided to sit next to me and chat me up. “*Oh, great,*” I thought. “Just what I need.” Over the course of the ride home I watched his eyes light up as he talked about his family and how his love of minutiae, numbers, and taxes led him to a 30+-year career at the IRS. (At which point I thought he was crazy.) Then he told me he was an attorney at the IRS. (At which point I thought he was dangerous.) To me, that seemed like the worst job ever. Leaving the train I realized though that in our conversation I heard the answer to a question I had been asking and praying for months: What can I offer the world with all of my seemingly disparate and random interests—my love of colonial and twentieth-century history; my delight and awe of hearing others’ stories and journeys; my thirst for mystery? The Man on the Subway was the first time I considered that what seems random is not random, or weird. It’s where we belong. If I were to pass by that man today I wouldn’t even know it. I never got his name, but he gave me a cup of cold water that day—the embodiment of discipleship Jesus speaks about in our Gospel lesson today.

But just as I could tell you about the Subway Man, I could tell you about Sally or Marion or Molly. I could tell you about these people who've been prophets, teachers, and thirst quenchers.

I could also tell you about you, because you know what? You matter. You **are** a disciple. I know we say we’re disciples but is that just because it’s the lingo-du-jour? How often do you really claim your commissioning as as disciple, as someone called to go, love, and serve?

When we think of “having an impact” our inclination is to think about historical greats. Or we look at numbers and signs of growth. But to do so is to deny the care of God—of a God who cares for even tiniest, most squawking bird of all. It all makes a difference when it’s done in the name and spirit of Jesus. Our job is not to focus on the outcome but on what we do.

That’s why when Jesus send his disciples out he reminds them that it will get hard; people will reject them. They will want an easier path. So he says to them, “hey, remember this: it’s not about you. They’re rejecting me.” This is not Jesus’ holy way of saying “suck it up, buttercup.” What he is saying is “you are part of a bigger story. This isn’t all on your shoulders. Find your place and live it.” You do not need to come up with a story or catchy slogan nor must you be remembered as Mother Theresa. You need to be you.

In essence, that’s what we are doing with the “Who We Are” Project. Many of you have expressed anxiety around this next phase in ministry: “*What are we doing? What are we changing? What’s this going to cost?*” I want you to know that we hear you. But we’re not doing anything that God has not already called or expects us to do. Having been a part of God’s story for nearly 50 years as St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, we are asking ourselves how can we use our special gifts, our interests, our resources, and our very selves so that we can be shining lights of hope and agents of freedom and transformation for those under the weight of darkness, poverty, or oppression in this community.

As David Lose reminds us, God does not call us to “heroic discipleship but to genuine discipleship, the kind of discipleship characterized by...‘everyday faith.’ Everyday in both senses of the word: ordinary, mundane even (there’s that word again!), simple. But also each and every day.”¹ Lest we forget, we are not simply “consumers of God’s love.” We’re also “providers...[and this] is not the place where those of us who know the secret password can gather to celebrate our good fortune.” Instead, “the Holy Spirit comes knocking at the door, disturbing our members-only meeting and reminding us that it is time to share.”² To take a risk. This is a re-fueling station in which we remember whose we are, why we’re here, and receive what we need to go forth in confidence.

¹ David Lose, “Even,” *In the Meantime*, June 26, 2017, <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/06/pentecost-4-a-even/>.

² Barbara Brown Taylor quoted in Kate Huey, “Holy Welcome/Welcoming Ways,” *Weekly Seeds*, June 24, 2011, http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit_weekly-seeds_holy-welcomewelcoming-ways.

As you know, in two weeks we are hosting a block party. It's not a fundraiser. It's not an attempt to drum up publicity. We are opening our doors to our community so that people may know joy, fun, and delight in a place they may pass by but don't stop in—*because what in the world is an Episcopalian anyway?*

Will what we do put end to the healthcare debate? No. Will it cure cancer? No. But there may be a chance conversation with someone. It may cause someone to know what kind of love is this. It may dispel our own assumptions about our community. It may dispels others about us. Not everything can be quantified into numbers and charts. Life is not quid pro quo in God's kingdom, and that's the reign that matters the most. The resurrection of Jesus over the ultimate ending, death, is proof enough that God will have the last word—not Mitch McConnell or Nancy Pelosi, not Joe Scarborough or Donald Trump.

Who's side would you rather be on?

This isn't a call to settle for little things. But what it does tell us is that everything we do matters. It's a call to stop making excuses that your life cannot make a difference or that you're too old to do something. This is a call to remind that it's not too late.

If you read this week's Midweek email news then you read about my favorite professor Molly...After more than 35+ years of teaching she continues to impact countless lives. She'd be the first to tell you that it's not something she set out to do. All she set out to do was to take her love of learning, of discovery, of ancient culture, and make a life of it. The rest, she left up to the Mystery of the Spirit.

Your charge this week is to answer one or two questions.

1. What is the "little cup of cold water" that you can offer to others? 2. Who has inspired you in the Christian journey? Who has given you a cup of cold water? Let that person know, or if they have joined the communion of saints, tell a relative. It may be the encouragement they need to continue this path of discipleship.

Friends, let the cool water of God's fill your being. Let it overflow and give life to parched places. You matter, so don't give up now.

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