

Unlikely Candidates: Introduction

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Well, good morning again and welcome here for this Sunday, September 18th, 2022. My name is Kent Dixon and I am the lead pastor here.

My sincere thanks to everyone for all their efforts and everything they did for my, I'm going to choke up again, for my ordination service and the luncheon last Sunday because that was super special. And folks, it's something I will never, never, never forget. So I recognized all the work that went in. Michelle and I were reflecting on details and things that we noticed over the course of the week and it was just a huge blessing.

And so I am deeply grateful and I feel loved and I'll love you right back. Ah, there we go. So welcome to everyone this morning, whether you're here in person, whether someone is listening online or on the phone line later in the week, we have lots of people who do that. So this morning I'm going to start out a little controversial. I hate to use, I hesitate really to use the F word in church, but sometimes it is just unavoidable.

[1 : 13] The temperatures are cooling off. And for some of us, our schedules have changed. And so it's fall.

Sad, but true. So January and the start of a new year is a great time to explore new topics together. We explore new topics in church in the new year.

We say, hey, it's a new year. Let's get a fresh start. But I believe fall is the same opportunity. And so I, pastors are nerds. Pastors are theology nerds.

We're study nerds. So I get excited when there's a new sermon series. So here we are. And this morning I'm beginning a sermon series that I'm pretty excited about called Unlikely Candidates. And there it is. Unlikely Candidates. So over the next few weeks, we're going to be, well, several weeks, we'll be taking a closer look at specific people from the Bible.

[2 : 20] And some of them will be familiar. Lots of them will. And some you may never even have heard of. And my hope is that this will be an enlightening and encouraging journey for all of us.

So this morning we're going to begin our series with a bit of an introduction. That's always a good place to start. So I have to laugh. I went to visit Marina Trapko this last Thursday.

And as she reflected on my ordination, she teased me with the fact that now I will be a real pastor. And I said to her, you think the training wheels are finally coming off, eh?

And she said, yep. She said, you're good. She said, actually said to me, are you going to start wearing a collar? And I said, Marina? And she said, well, shouldn't you?

And I said, okay. So then we had to get into that. I said, Catholic? And I said, para-Catholic, Protestant denominations, Anglican, United, Lutheran.

[3 : 26] They wear collars. I said, Baptist? Not so much. And she said, bring it back. And she said, I won't. I said, that's not my gig. So, but yeah, it was great.

So over the years since I've been at Braemar, I've said to Marina a few times that she and I have challenged each other. We've built a relationship that is much more like nephew and aunt.

She does a lot of finger shaking and challenging at me sometimes. Then a pastor and a congregant. But as I reflected on what she said since we met, I started to think, pastor?

Really? Really? Me? A pastor? And even in moments last week during my ordination service, Dennis would say something or Sam would say something or something would happen within that service and I would just have these flashes of my own perspective of myself.

So I would be the first person to say that I personally fit the definition of an unlikely candidate. I am insecure at times.

[4 : 41] I am anxious and worried more often than I'd like to admit. I am extremely OCD. I was with someone on the weekend and I was straightening labels and he just said, wow.

I said, I got it. I got to do it or it'll drive me crazy. I'm a notorious, and most of you know this, I'm a notorious overthinker. Notorious. And an even occasional serial procrastinator.

Well, is that a snicker from Michelle? Well, I'm a liar. Well, I'm a liar. And yet I can declare that in spite of my perception of myself or even how others may perceive me in negative ways at times, God has chosen to use this unlikely candidate for his purposes.

Okay, so I'm certainly not comparing myself to Moses, all right? So let's just say that right out of the gate. But I definitely recognize and resonate with his insecurity at the beginning of his call by God. His sense of personal inadequacy when God called him. And we read about that in Exodus 4, verses 10 to 11.

[6 : 00] And you can look it up or I will read it for us. Moses said to the Lord, Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant.

I am slow of speech and tongue. And the Lord said to him, Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute?

Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go. I will help you speak. And I will teach you what to say. Our all-knowing God could have been, would have been, well aware of what Moses was going to say.

Well aware of Moses' potential laundry list of, Oh yeah, but God, whoa, I just can't. And yet our God is patient. But we see here also how God fully intends to use Moses to achieve his purposes in Egypt without allowing Moses to self-select out.

[7 : 16] Right? We recognize that. And it's the same with us. When God calls us, we need to trust that he will use us.

And not be so quick to make excuses. Not be so quick to say, Whoa, whoa, I am nothing more than an unlikely candidate. Lord, not me.

So have you ever wondered why does God act through human beings? I've wondered that often in my life.

Wouldn't it be far easier for God if he just acted on his own, acted in his own way, under his own power, which he could easily do, and just avoided all this often inevitable result of humanity failing, of us heading towards sin.

But we recognize, and this is the grace of God, that God's action in the world is always done in partnership with humanity.

[8 : 22] Always. Not in spite of us, but in partnership with us. God wants to work with us to bring his plans to fruition.

It's a partnership. So isn't that both amazing and humbling to recognize that? God doesn't want to do it under his own power, although he could.

So beginning in Genesis, we recognize that God formed us out of dust. We also recognize, and I have said these words in memorial services, that our earthly bodies will return to dust one day.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust are the words. So as we reflect on our dusty origins, and the fact that we're also shaped in the form that God intended for us from the beginning, to me it's no coincidence that Scripture is just full of analogies of, and I wish Marg was here, pottery.

We are all created by God and shaped by God. That's humanity and God's relationship with us. In Isaiah 64, verse 8, it's declared, Yet you, Lord, are our Father.

[9 : 54] We are the clay, you are the potter, and we are all the work of your hand. Romans 9, 21, Paul reminds us, Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

Friends, God made each of us. I think it can be easy to forget that. In our everyday lives, God made you. Every human being we encounter in our lives, even the ones who drive us crazy, God created them.

And God uses each one of us. He will use each one of his created ones and every circumstances in our lives for his purpose.

So whether that purpose is to shape or mature us personally, to feel molded sometimes in a personal way by God, or to use us to achieve his plan in some way, we can recognize that we matter to God and each of us has a purpose.

So I have a question for you this morning. How do you view the people, other people, or the circumstances of your life?

[11 : 24] I can see people actually pondering the question. How do you view other people or the circumstances in your life? So for example, are people or circumstances in your life just in the way of what you want to do or what you think you need to achieve?

Are other people just irritating to you? Are they an inconvenience? I have a friend who says, I used to be a people person, but people ruined it for me.

Are other people an inconvenience, an obligation, a hassle? Are other people, even worse, essentially invisible to you?

Unless they have a direct and personal connection to you of some kind. Or you need to interact with them to get what you want.

So I have another question for you this morning. As you reflect on your life so far, can you recognize the ways in which God has used you personally to achieve his purpose?

[12 : 44] Think about it. So our next question this morning, why does God choose unlikely candidates? Well, it's a good question.

So we're going to see in the coming weeks, as we explore the lives of people whose lives are recorded in the Bible, we're likely, and I'm going to go out of my way to make sure this happens, find ways in which they are relatable to us, in ways in which we can understand their story, we can see God at work in their story, and probably be able to apply things from their story to our own lives.

So we're going to consider, in a lot of ways, ways in which these people will have been unremarkable, at least from our perspective, maybe from the perspective of their setting or their surroundings, their flaws and their circumstances will quite likely be familiar to us.

And their lives, in many ways, will not be unlike our own. Obviously, aside from their historical and cultural context.

I was thinking of getting everyone to wear a toga next Sunday as we start, just to get us into the mood, but it's not happening, so. But we're also going to consider how God chose these people, how he worked in and through them, and then what we can learn, as I said, from their stories.

[14 : 23] So what are the qualifications of an unlikely candidate? Let's consider. First, unlikely candidates are people who are relatable.

And then the lights begin to flicker. See, either the computer goes down or the lights flicker. That's just, that will be my legacy. These people we look at will be flawed.

They will have struggles like we do. I'm not going to put people on a pedestal for you every Sunday so that you feel terrible. So that you leave on Sunday morning and think, oh, I go to church to feel better and Pastor Kent punched me with guilt again.

It's not the goal. So over the course of the series, we'll identify just how unremarkable some of these people will be. How unexpected it will be that God chose them, that God worked through them.

Certainly by human standards. Right? I see smiles on faces as the lights flicker. I'm ignoring it. We'll recognize qualities in these people that we may have in common with them.

[15 : 45] We'll recognize procrastinators and lazy people and chickens and all sorts, not actual chickens, people who were afraid and ran away from God's call on their life.

We'll recognize people like this. And we're going to recognize, uncomfortably, that we have lots in common with them. Absolutely. But we're also going to be reminded that God used them anyway. And he will use us too. Second, I believe unlikely candidates are often people who recognize their need for a savior.

They recognize their need to be redeemed. And it's through that redemption that they have the opportunity, that we have the opportunity, to partner with God in what he's doing in the world. God doesn't choose, my friends, I say thank God for this. He doesn't choose the pious and the holy. I would be hopelessly out of luck.

[16 : 58] He chooses the humble and the willing. Third, unlikely candidates are not boastful.

They aren't people who seek the spotlight. They're not people who crave the attention and the praise of other people. They're not people who look for credit.

You all saw, anyone who was here last Sunday for the service saw me cringing under the weight of attention, under the weight of my call by God.

I value it. It's part of who I am, but I do not seek the attention. Many people this week have called me reverend, jokingly, some seriously.

A friend of mine who's our pastor in our church in Cold Lake, I was telling someone else this morning. She said, how does it feel, Reverend Kent? And I said, I don't know. I buried him in the yard last weekend.

[18:01] Everybody gets a one reverend and that's it. You can call me at once. No. If people are comfortable with that, please, I don't want to discourage you, but I'm not seeking it. I don't want it.

But I am honored by what God is doing. People who are not boastful, they recognize they have no cause to brag about what they personally have done.

Right? They recognize an opportunity to reflect the attention back to God because it's from God that their gifts have come, their blessings have come, their call has come.

Fourth, unlikely candidates have, shockingly, no special qualifications.

None. You've heard the quote before, God does not call the equipped. Hallelujah, that's my story.

He equips the called.

[19:06] I think we'd recognize that most of us are happy to step up when a task is easy. Can you recognize that? Yeah, I've got the gifting, I have the time, I can, all the things, yep, I am up to this task.

Easy to step forward. But when God calls us to leave our comfort zone, to step into the unknown, that's when, friends, I honestly believe that we waver in our commitment.

I am very afraid of the unknown. I know God is there. Doesn't mean my humanity doesn't show when I think, ooh, I need to know all the things before I can step in.

God just wants you to take that step. Get out of the boat. So we may also not feel worthy of God's call.

That's another thing. But he promises that he will make us complete in everything he calls us to do.

Every good work that he calls us into that is in alignment with his will.

[20:20] He promises that he will equip us with whatever is needed to carry out his purpose in our lives. We recognize the important message in the words of Hebrews 13.

Paul reminds us that God will make us complete in every good work to do his will. Working in you what is pleasing in his sight.

So now that we've taken some time this morning to recognize what it is what it means to be unlikely candidates in the weeks ahead we're going to start looking at the lives of specific people from the Bible to see what we can learn from their call see how God partnered with them to achieve his purposes.

I'm looking forward to going on this journey together. Friends, my prayer is that God will use the stories of his people from the past to encourage and inspire us here and now.

Does that sound okay? Amen.