

RAISED UP

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Well, here it is: the most recognized sports symbol in the world -- and one of the most well-known symbols in virtually every country, second only to Coca-Cola. It's the swoosh, and symbolizes speed, determination, and, when the Greek word Nike is added, ultimate victory.

It was created by a graphic design student at the Portland State University, Carolyn Davidson, who was doing some freelance work for a company named Blue Ribbon Sports. She was paid exactly \$35 for the work, but soon, as the company produced quality footwear and grew in stature and profit, the symbol took on a life of its own.

Who'd have thought. \$35 bucks. Art student. Two intersecting bent lines. Simple, basic design. 3.5 hours of labor. The business owner didn't even like the design at first, but thought it might grow on him. And now it is a copyright protected image worth many dollars because it was connected to a quality product and well-marketed to the consumer world.

Something simple -- created by an ordinary someone -- became something great when connected to a great product.

3500 years ago, it was a similar thing with a simple herdsman named Moses. Having grown up in Egypt, he had renounced his former life in Pharaoh's house and run away to simplicity, humility, quietness. As he meandered around in his fields, he never expected that his life would change so dramatically. But there he was, in our text, being confronted by the God of the Universe in the burning bush. "Moses, I have heard the pain of my people, and I am sending you to lead them out of slavery and unto a land flowing with milk and honey." --- "No Lord, I'm not worthy. No Lord, I'm a bad speaker. No Lord, they won't believe me. No Lord, I can't do it. Please, please send someone else -- someone more talented, more able, more gifted than me."

But God had great love for His people and great plans for Moses. And, because Moses was connected to the solid rock of God's love, God used the gifts and talents He had placed in Moses, and he was raised up to be, aside from the Lord Jesus Himself, the greatest prophet the world has known.

It was a similar thing with Gideon. There he is on the threshing floor doing trying to hide his grain from the Midianites. Not particularly bold. Not particularly courageous. But the Angel of the Lord comes to him and addresses him this way: “Greetings mighty warrior.”

“What? Who’s he talking to?” Gideon thought. “No mighty warrior here.” And he says to the Lord: “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family?”

But God says, “You are a mighty warrior when you are connected to me. And within you I have placed all the skills necessary to lead my people.” Gideon is hesitant. He needs some signs from God to convince him. But in the end, God raises Him up to extraordinary heights as he assembles the men of Israel to fight against their oppressing enemies. And, with God’s help, he is victorious.

How ‘bout those first century disciples. 11 men who went into hiding after Jesus crucifixion. Courage? Confidence? World-transforming energy? You wouldn’t have thought so. Denial, fear, anxiety more like it. Self-preservation seems to top the list. But Jesus declares, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you -- yes YOU -- will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the utter ends of the earth. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And it isn’t long before these men turn the world upside down risking life and limb to offer people the Good News of Jesus.

You see, when our God calls, He also enables. When our God raises somebody up, He also equips Him to do the job.

This is Veteran’s Day weekend -- and as I think about all those men and women who stood strong on the battlefield -- or on ships, in airplanes, -- I doubt that a single one, as a little boy or girl, envisioned themselves risking life and limb to protect our country. I’m sure they saw themselves as simple, ordinary people. Perhaps, as they heard of wars, they even envisioned themselves unable to stand the pressure, the gunfire, the casualties. But take simple, ordinary people, and connect them to an omnipotent and loving God, and something magical happens. Cause buried deep within are the gifts and talents God has created and invested in each one.

You see, brothers and sisters in Christ, when Jesus went to that cross of Calvary 2000 years ago, He put to death all the barriers and blockades that want to hold that stuff inside. You know, the things that hold you back from reaching your potential -- whether it be fear, stress, uncertainty, -- or self-centeredness, pride, preoccupation with your own needs. When Jesus gave His life for you He said, "I will not leave you as an orphan. I will be with you. And my Holy Spirit will dwell within you and kindle in you both the desire and the will to make a difference."

And by His grace, having forgiven our sin and reshaping our past hang-ups, He mobilizes simple, humble, ordinary people like us and enables us to be disciples, -- disciples who make a difference. The talents and gifts and abilities that simmer inside of us are awakened -- the hesitation, discomfort, and fear are diminished -- and a new person arises.

Imagine the venomous Saul of Tarsus, who, much like those who terrorized Paris on Friday, descended upon early Christendom with the intent of extermination. I'm sure the early Christians were more than convinced that this man was like unto the Devil himself as he gathered his misguided troops to commandeer these Jesus-followers into Jerusalem. But then the Lord Jesus opens up the heavens and cries out to Saul in the brightness of His glory, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And soon thereafter, the Spirit of God has turned Saul's zeal against God's people to a zeal for Christ and the Gospel. Saul, now called Paul, goes boldly where no man has gone before to tell others about the Savior he once persecuted.

What about you and me? We look in the mirror and ask, "What could I do? How could a simple one like me make a difference?"

And Jesus says, "If only you could see what I see. I am the Rock, and when you build your life upon me and trust in me for your future, I can do great things through you. For remember, when you are built upon Me, you have at your disposal omnipotent power coupled with abundant love."

Today's Stewardship Sunday here at Beautiful Savior. All of you should have received one of the pages from our Stewardship Committee to fill out and turn in today. I hope you've taken a look at it and are seriously considering how you might help us, as a congregation, grow in accomplishing His work in our midst and in our community.

Today, I'd like you to do two things as a symbol of what we've discussed here today.

1) You know how I said that our amazing God can see the hidden talent that lies within us and can move us to use it to His glory. Well, inside every ordinary hymnal that sits in front of you, you will find a one dollar bill buried in hymn 537, Beautiful Savior. Today I'd like you to take that dollar and put it inside one of the boxes outside as a symbol of God's Spirit that has gifted you with many talents, gifts, and abilities. By placing it in one of the boxes outside, you can direct its usage toward an area of ministry that is meaningful to you.

2) When you put this dollar inside one of the boxes, please also take, out of the glass bowls, one of the black rocks. This is to remind you that your house -- your strength -- your hope is built upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ. He is the Way the Truth and the Life, and He wants to accomplish in you, what St. Peter describes in his first epistle where he says:

4As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

There is a marker on the table for you to write your name on the stone. Sit it on your dresser or some other prominent place in your home to remind you of Jesus love expressed on the cross and of His baptismal embrace of you, whom He has called by name.