

CRIBB<S>NOTE

“God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.” That statement reflects the obvious. We witness acts of kindness everyday without thinking very deeply about it. In fact, we expect people to behave in a civil manner and to perform in ways that promote a more orderly society. If someone needs help, we respond with our best efforts. When something goes wrong, we organize ourselves to make things right. It all becomes so ordinary and routine, even to the point of taking for granted the minor miracles that occur around us. We tend not to give much thought to activities that leave a lasting imprint on a person’s life.

What seems like nothing might make the difference between hope and despair. We never know how much comes from an encounter that sets someone else on a path toward destiny. When we scan our memories we come across faces and moments that changed our life. If it had not been for a single word of encouragement or the intervention by someone at a precise time, life as we know it would not exist. Think about it.

We are connected together in the human web in many and various formations. It is impossible to untangle our ties.

A few days ago I attended a meeting where many of the faces were previously unknown to me. During a sidebar conversation a gentleman mentioned the University of California, Santa Cruz. I spoke up and said my younger sister had attended and graduated from that institution. Another person turned to me and asked, “What is your sister’s name?” I told him her name. He then repeated my sister’s full name, took a slight step backward, flipped his head skyward, let out a boisterous laugh and said, “I used to date your sister.”

“It is a ‘small world’ after all.” We really are tied very closely together and do depend on each other. Sometimes there is less than ‘six degrees of separation’ between us. Mundane moments can transform into critical exchanges that define the meaning of oneness. We can ill-afford to discard or ignore anyone. We need everybody. We never know just how important we are to each other.

The Biblical story of David is filled with non-descript characters who acted in ways that determined the fate of a nation. For example, Elkanah is one of those people who show up without any special talent. He had two wives and lots of children. There was nothing particularly outstanding about him. His household was imperfect and suffered some major problems. There was trouble and pain between his wives. Most of the time, Elkanah appeared clueless while envy, jealousy, and arrogance threatened to wreck his family. He was just an ordinary guy. But, look closer. Go deeper.

Elkanah was a man of religious conviction. Every year he faithfully took his family to the temple to carry out his duty. He honored God with gifts, sacrifices, and worship. He lived devoutly and obediently. In the midst of her heartache, one of his wives, Hannah, cried out to God. Hannah was ridiculed by her rival because she had no children. The taunting hurt Hannah to the core of our soul. In her agony she prayed for a son and promised to give him back to God. Elkanah and Hannah were ordinary people facing the depths of disappointment.

God heard Hannah’s cries and answered her prayer. A son was born. Samuel became the prophet who watched over the transition of the Israelites from a leadership by judges to a nation led by a king. “God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.”

Today, God is using us. We may not feel very special. We may think there is nothing we can do to change the way of the world. We may believe our lives mean nothing beyond ourselves. But God expects much more from us than we can imagine. God has confidence in our ability to do extraordinary things that will have an impact on others. What is required is our faithfulness. Just as Elkanah kept Torah and the Covenant, we too can be faithful in our reverence toward God and our caring presence with each other. We are just ordinary folk in an extraordinary moment. Let’s open our minds, hearts, hands, and ourselves to do something together with God’s grace.