

Helen Keller was just nineteen months old when an illness left her deaf and blind. Unable to communicate with the world around her, many assumed there would always be limits to what she could become. But her teacher, Anne Sullivan, refused to believe that. She saw intelligence, curiosity, and possibility where others saw only disability. Then one day, at a water pump, as cool water flowed over Helen's hand, Anne repeatedly spelled **W-A-T-E-R** into the other. Suddenly, Helen realized that everything had a name. She later wrote, *"That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free."* From that moment on, she learned to read, to write, to speak, graduated from college, wrote books, and became one of the most influential advocates of the twentieth century. It all began because someone believed in her before she could believe in herself.

I wonder if you've ever had someone like that in your own life—a parent, a teacher, a coach, a mentor—someone who saw something in you that you simply couldn't see in yourself. Sometimes another person's faith in us becomes the very thing that allows us to discover who we really are. I think that's exactly what's happening in today's Gospel.

Let me explain, Rabbi and scholar Shmuel Safrai, in his book *The Jewish People in the First Century*, wrote extensively on the selection process that rabbis would use to choose their disciples, and this work was developed further by Rob Bell in his book *Dust*. As they explain it, at the age of six, children would begin to learn the Torah; this training was called bat-sepher. From age eight to ten, they would memorize the Torah from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Five books,

By the end of bat-sepher training, most kids would go and learn their family tradeteh Rabbi would not choose them to be a disciple...he would send them home. **but** the best of the best would advance to the next level. These with the most natural ability would then memorize Genesis to Malachi. After this, the best of the best of the best would then apply to a rabbi to become his disciple. Now, it's important to note...that A disciple does not just want to know what his rabbi knows, but he wants to be like his rabbi and do what his rabbi does. But even after all this work, the rabbi might say to a trainee, "You love God and know the Torah, but you simply don't have what it takes to be my disciple. Go learn your family trade." They were not allowed to follow their master, so they left.

But if the rabbi thought the child was the best of the best of the best, the rabbi would then say, "Come, follow me." You would then leave your family, friends and your synagogue and village, and you would devote your entire life to being like your rabbi, learning to do what your rabbi does. This is what it meant to be a disciple

Now, back to Peter, As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers; Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherman. What were they??????????? Fisherman..... Why?

Because they didn't make the cut! A Rabbi had probably told them they weren't the best of the best, and sent them to "ply their trade". Jesus goes to the rejects and to the "not good-enoughs" and calls them!

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Think about this...here comes a Rabbi walking down the beach. Peter and Andrew are busy learning the family business. This is important to them. Their family's well-being is dependent upon how well they learn this trade. They have a lot of money wrapped up in their equipment. And this guy comes walking up and says, "Come follow me." They drop everything and do it!

Can you imagine though, being told you were good enough, that a teacher believed in you when others didn't. Why would they immediately drop their nets and follow him...because Jesus believed in them before they believed in him.

This brings us to today's Gospel. Jesus, after spending some time praying, approaches the disciples walking on water. The disciples are afraid but Jesus comforts them. Peter, being a tad precocious, says "If it's you, command me to come to you on the water." This is what a disciple does, a disciple wants to follow their teacher. If you are a disciple you've committed your entire life to being like your rabbi. If you see your Rabbi walk on water, what do you want to do? Walk yourself. So this disciple gets out on the water and walks...but then he starts to sink...so he yells, "Jesus save me" And Jesus grabs, him, helps him back into the boat and admonishes him. O you of little faith, why did you doubt.

But it's important to notice one thing. Who does Peter doubt? It wasn't Jesus, he believed that Jesus could save him. When he started to sink he called out to Jesus for help. Peter didn't doubt Jesus... Peter lost faith in himself. Peter loses faith that he can do what his Rabbi is doing.

If the rabbi calls you to be his disciple, then the Rabbi believes you can actually be like him. Those who are called, are those “believed-in-ones”. Isn’t it more exciting to think of Christianity less as system of our beliefs...and more about God’s belief in us to change the world. As we read the stories of Jesus life with his disciples, what do we find frustrates him to no end?...It’s ever and always When his disciples lose faith in themselves.

He even reminds them on several occasions, “Hey guys, you didn’t choose me, I chose you. The entire rabbinical system at the time was based on the Rabbi having faith in his disciples.

Now, let’s spend some time here because the implications of this truth are astounding for us, as they were for them. A rabbi would only pick a disciple who he thought could actually do what he was doing. Notice how many places in the Gospels Jesus gets frustrated with his disciples. Was it because they were incompetent or incapable? No, but rather how competent and capable they are. He sees what they could be and could do, and when they fall short it provokes him. It isn’t their failure that’s the problem; it’s their greatness. They don’t realize how good they can be. They don’t realize their greatness.

At the end, on Jesus last day on Earth before the ascension, Jesus speaks to his disciples. He tells them to go to the ends of the earth and make more disciples. And then he leaves. He promises to send his spirit to guide them and comfort them and empower them, but Jesus himself leaves the future in the hands of ordinary

people...Ordinary people he believed in. He doesn't stick around to make sure they don't mess it all up. He leaves. He trusts that they can actually do it. Jesus believes in them.

God has an incredibly high view of people. God believes that we are capable of amazing things.

We've all been told that we need to believe in Jesus...and this important and good thing...But what I want us to know today, is that Jesus believes in us. Jesus believes that we can bring peace, that we can bring reconciliation, that we can love well and change the world for good. Simply put, our Rabbi, and our Lord and savior, thinks we can be like him. Personalize this for one second, Jesus believe in you....in you. Jesus believes in us. IN trinity. In you and in me, in what we can do. And if Jesus believe in us, then I'm sure not going to doubt us. Like Keller at the pump that day, May this word awaken our souls, and give us light, hope and peace. Amen.